The Little Dragon (Part II)

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The Little Dragon (Part II)

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Summary

Part 2 of The Little Dragon

Will is rescued from his captor, but he's only survived this long by murdering and sinking into the will of the Dragon. Will he be able to survive in a world set against him?

Chapter 1

It’s been two years since a boy named Will Graham disappeared. And life was going swimmingly for Hannibal Lecter.

Hannibal sliced through the man's sternum. His goal was to open the man while he still breathed so he could see his lungs. He wanted to see what would happen when he tore the man’s lungs from his body. Would he scream? How would the screams die when his air was cut off? Could the man endure the pain? Hannibal had opened a patient in a similar fashion about three years ago, but had been unable to experiment. Not when said person was a patient lying on his emergency room table. He couldn't exactly butcher when surrounded by other medical staff. At the time, he had been finishing his residency as an emergency surgeon and had the social duty to save the life rather than experiment.

But now, he held a permanent position as an emergency surgeon for the past five years. He felt he deserved a treat. The role at the hospital had begun to tax him. He was quite good as an ER doctor, and the work gave him ample opportunities to play god and pick pigs to slaughter. But, alas, his mind grew bored. He could kill all day, but it lacked the luster of subtle manipulation. He wanted to play god within people's minds not just with their bodies.

He had gone back to school for psychiatry, a place where he knew he would thrive. The professors loved him and praised his writing. His thesis on Social Exclusion was on its way to be published. His doctoral advisor Dr. Alana Bloom was enthralled with him. Hannibal smiled, it was easy to wrap her around his finger.

Soon he would step down from his position as a surgeon and turn to the practice of psychology. He considered waiting several more years to become a therapist, but the temptation to play with people's minds was too much.

His phone rang. It was Alana. Hannibal paused in his work. The man was still breathing and was in a stable, though unconscious, state. Hannibal knew he shouldn't risk answering while he was in the middle of slaughtering the pig but he always enjoyed a risk. He smiled, thinking of the ridiculous Wilde quote he enjoyed, ‘Let nothing be lost upon you. Be always searching for new sensations. Be afraid of nothing!’.

Yes, he thought, eat, drink, and take risks, because tomorrow you die. He answered, "Hello, Alana?"

"Hello Hannibal. Are you busy?"

Hannibal smiled at the bloody mess before him, "Not at all, how can I help you?"

"First, I need to apologize."

Hannibal raised an eyebrow, "Whatever for?"

Alana sighed. She sounded tired and stressed, "You thesis article. I may have shown it to an outside source and now they want to talk to you."

Hannibal frowned. The journal wasn't to be published for another week. Alana shouldn't have given the document to another source. Hannibal wondered who the source was that convinced Dr. Bloom to share Hannibal's intellectual property.

"I know the article was supposed to be published soon, I'm so sorry for revealing it," her voice trembled and Hannibal felt glad he provoked such fear and respect. "But it was for a case I'm consulting on with the FBI. Your article might be helpful in catching a killer."

The FBI? Now Hannibal felt he was really playing with fire. The FBI had been after him for years. Most of his kills he never displayed, but the few he felt inclined to share had been investigated and documented by the FBI. They had named him the Chesapeake Ripper. A name which Hannibal liked, even if it lacked class. Hannibal smirked, his hunters were now seeking out his thoughts. He wondered if his own words would be used to hunt him. The irony felt strangely amusing.

"I'm sure your reasoning is valid. And I'm glad my article can be of use, even if still unpublished. Don't worry yourself, Alana."

Hannibal heard a little sigh of relief. "Thank you Hannibal."

He knew she'd still feel guilty. Hannibal would use her gratitude later. She would owe him. He prompted her for more information, "Did the research help the case?"

"I brought up some of your writings to Jack Crawford, head of the Behavioral Science unit. He read the article but wants to hear from you." She sounded worried, "He'd like to bring you on as a consultant."

Interesting and thrilling. Hannibal was excited by the idea of infiltrating the FBI. If he could maneuver his way into the heads of the people who hunted him, he would be invincible. Yes, science did say killers would often infiltrate the official case workings. But Hannibal wasn't forcing his way in, rather, he was being invited.

"The opportunity to assist on a case with the FBI would be a wonderful experience as I turn to psychiatry. But I would only join with your approval. I appreciate your advice, Alana." He left it up to her, but he knew she would never deny him.

"It's for you to decide, Hannibal, but I will tell you, Jack Crawford is ostentatious and works his agents into the ground. The only thing that matters to him is putting away the criminals. Even if he leaves a trail of bodies behind him."

"There's something admirable about that dedication, but I will be leery of his workings."

Alana sighed somewhat unhappily, but she didn't deny him, "I have a meeting with him tomorrow. Why don't you join us? We can get you caught up on the case."

The man on his table began to stir.

"That sounds wonderful, now Alana, I must run. Why don't you text me the details?"

"Alright. I'll see you later Hannibal."

"Until then. Goodbye Alana." He quickly ended the call before the man's screams reached the speaker. If he worked quickly he would have just enough time experiment, harvest his dinner, and dine before his meeting with the FBI. Hannibal grinned. He wondered if he could convince Jack Crawford to eat at his table.

Yes, assisting the FBI would be quite amusing.

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Jack Crawford's office had a burnt smell to it. Though no other nose could perceive it except Hannibal. A normal person could probably smell the old coffee, the tired sweat, and the worn leather of the seats, but Hannibal could smell more. He wondered if the agent smoked. Not cigarettes, something more classic. Imported cigars? He stored the little fact away. Practically everyone would be terrified of the domineering man leading the meeting, everyone except Hannibal of course.

He studied the agent. He was curious about the workings of the FBI, and even more so of their leader. Jack Crawford was a large man, his physicality mirroring his personality, he was brash and direct and spoke with absolute authority. Hannibal caught the sly cleverness within the man, which was carefully hidden beneath his vener.

Hannibal had to admit, he admired the man for his power and person. If there were anyone for the Chesapeake Ripper to face head on, Jack Crawford would be a worthy opponent.

"We're calling him the tooth fairy, because he leaves teeth marks at every crime scene. Dental doesn't match anywhere. Either he's never been to a dentist or the man made a set of dentures for himself.”

“He’s biting the victims," Hannibal assumed, as he perused one of the case files.

“Yes, post-mortem.” Crawford clarified.

"The bite marks are compulsive?" Hannibal asked, beginning to form his own profile in his mind.

“Yes. Unfortunately we've found them on every one of the victims. He likes to bite,” Crawford chuckled darkly, “It was one of the main reasons we’ve connected the cases. He’s crossing state lines to pick his victims. Without his signature bite, local authorities might have never connected the cases.”

“How many have there been?” Hannibal was curious if this murderer challenged his own status. He doubted it, but it was always good to know the competition.

“There’s been six families and at least two individuals thus far with the teeth marks. Based on the victim pool, we believe he’s just recently begun killing families. But we think he’s been killing for a long time.”

“He’s honed his skill. Now he wants bigger targets,” Alana surmised.

Jack nodded in agreement, he went on, “He hunts on the full moon. Kills with a handgun if necessary, though strangulation is his preferred method. So we are attempting to dig through archives on any murders on full moons that have a similar kill method. Unfortunately there are a lot of unsolved gun deaths.”

“Are there any other defining attributes?”

“Yes,” Alana said jumping in, “We have missing persons. All of the family’s have an individual missing from their household. One of the individual victim’s boyfriend is still missing as well. We think he's taking them and disposing of them in a site we’ve yet to find.”

“Which is where your work comes into practice,” Jack turned to Hannibal surveying the man with a keen eye, “What do your studies say on this?”

“Social exclusion theory is a broad subject, mainly studying how groups are detached from being able to fully participate in society. But in my particular study I look at how individuals with a perchance of criminality are often those excluded most from society. This exclusion may be their trigger or their ability to become what we refer to as psychopaths. They have no connection with the outside world, so they have no regret or emotion in murdering those outside their circles.”

“It’s an interesting theory, but do you think we can apply it to the case? I know, Alana certainly seems to think so,” Jack smiled at the doctor before turning, raising a brow at Hannibal, “What do you think?”

Hannibal knew this was the moment where he needed to prove his theory to stay on the case. And he was determined to stay. It would be much more stimulating than the emergency room work. He gave his best profile, “Your killer has been excluded from some portion of society. It may be possible he’s been forced out of a job or his family circle. From the killings, he’s handy with a gun, I would guess ex-military or ex-law enforcement. Possibly a dishonorable discharge might have triggered his killings.”

Jack was nodding slightly as if in agreement, Alana gave him a small secret smile of encouragement. Hannibal continued, “But the most important component of this theory are the victims. If we follow the theory, we know our killer does not feel connected to the victims. He’s excluded. If we find the common denominator between the victims and likewise the missing persons, we could discover which circles he’s included and excluded from, we can find his victims before he reaches them and catch him.”

Jack nodded tentatively, obviously considering Hannibal’s words, “We could set a trap. I like it. I’d like you to have you work on the case with us Dr. Lecter, if you can spare the time.”

“Of course,” Hannibal answered immediately.

“I want you to go over the victim pool. See if you can find their circles. Also, why don’t you look at the potential missing victim cases. There are alot and it would be good to have another set of eyes on it – Beverly!”

A young agent appeared in the director's doorway.

"Dr. Lecter, this is Agent Katz. She's been working the case for some time, she'll get you the files. Bev, this is Dr. Lecter, please get him the files on the Tooth Fairy. Also the cases we've pulled on the full moon nights as well as the unsolved murder cases using a handgun or strangulation."

Beverly grinned, "That's a lot. We might need to get you a box, Dr. Lecter."

"Probably two," Jack muttered.

Hannibal smiled politely at the agent as he stood to go with her. He greeted her with a hand shake before turning back to Alana and Jack, "It was a pleasure meeting you, I only wish it were on better circumstances."

"As do I," Crawford raised a hand in a clear dismissal wave, "Thank you, Dr. Lecter."

Hannibal nodded goodbye and left with Katz. They walked through the heart of the FBI to the filing room. They did not exaggerate the amount of files. Agent Katz stuffed the boxes, almost overflowing with the official documents. Hannibal watched with some amusement at the way the FBI accounted for all the atrocities of the world on sheets of yellowed paper. He wondered how many files were dedicated to himself.

"Alrighty. So, in this box is all the cases that have definitely been linked to the Fairy, and this one," She heaved the overflowing box into Hannibal's arms with a grunt, "Is the unsolved disappearances on cases with a hand gun or strangulation. Also any unsolved cases on full moons from the last four years. Though I can't make sense of any of it."

"Sense of what?" Hannibal asked while the agent took the other box and began leading him out of the maze of a building.

"I just don't get why he's taking people," She answered without looking back at him, her ponytail swishing as she strode quickly down the halls. "It's obviously some ritual of some sort, but why take them in the first place? Are they trophies? Like how the Ripper takes organs?"

Hannibal's ears perked at the mention of himself. He answered slowly, "They might be trophies. But if we are comparing the Fairy and the Ripper, why do you think the Ripper takes his trophies?"

Beverly laughed, "The science team has a working theory, but it probably doesn't suit your tastes, Dr. Lecter." Beverly shot him an amused grin, glancing at his tailored suit and his slicked back hair.

"Try me," Hannibal challenged, slightly annoyed that his person suit did not impress the young agent.

Beverly cocked her eyebrow, accepting his challenge, "Well, not to put it too crassly, we think he's getting off on the organs."

Hannibal's lip curled in disgust. Beverly laughed at his expression. "Told you, you wouldn't like it."

Hannibal hated the idea of his work being interpreted in such a rude manner. He would think about it more later but for now he cleared his disgust and replaced it with a good humored smile, "You're correct, that is not my taste."

They reached the exterior doors, Hannibal pushed the door open, holding it with his shoulder for the agent to follow. If he was seen as an honorable and moral person, he might as well play the perfect gentleman. And to be honest Hannibal enjoyed playing it for everyone except those without class or manners.

"My car is just this way," Hannibal said, leading Beverly through the parking lot.

She whistled as they reached Hannibal's Bentley, "Nice ride."

Alana appeared from the front of the car, "Hope you're not whistling at me, agent Katz."

Beverly grinned, "Doctor Bloom, are you saying you're a ride?"

Alana chuckled, "I admit nothing while Hannibal is here."

Beverly winked, "Alrighty, well I assume you guys know each other, so I'll leave you. Unless you need anymore help?"

Hannibal glanced down at the box, "No, thank you for your help, agent Katz."

Beverly smiled and waved at both of them, "I'm gonna go now! Nice to meet you Dr. Lecter. And always good to see you Dr. Bloom!"

Beverly left the box and scurried back to the headquarters, shooting a wink back at Alana. Hannibal grinned at Alana with a raised brow, "Are you playing hard to get?"

Alana laughed and punched Hannibal lightly on the arm, "Seeing as she won't stop calling me 'Doctor Bloom', I doubt it's going anywhere."

"I don't know, I've heard titles are, how do you Americans say it? A bit of a turn on for some." Hannibal teased. He enjoyed the familiarity that had grown between them. Alana was arrogant, intelligent, and humorous. He was enjoying manipulating her and would hone her selfish ambitions into something beneficial for himself.

Alana gasped in playful shock, "Doctor Lecter!"

He laughed as he opened his car and loaded the boxes before turning back to Alana, "So, what did Crawford think?"

"He's hesitant, but glad to have you. He can use all the brain power he can get." Alana answered honestly.

"I like him. Do you think he'd accept a dinner invitation?" Hannibal genuinely wondered.

Alana smiled and shook her head, “Impress him first, Hannibal, then you’ll be indispensable.”

Hannibal agreed, he may have succeeded in this round, but to pull Jack Crawford into his fold would need more time and work. He needed to solve the case.

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Hannibal sat in his dining room. The files spread out before him on the large table. Hannibal wished he had a large office to work, but alas, his surgeon’s office was small and cramped and his home office was currently being used as his drawing studio. So, he resorted to using his dining room table. It was the only space large enough for the piles of papers.

Hannibal raked a hand through his blonde hair. It had lost it’s hold hours ago and had begun to fall into his eyes. He wanted to cut it, but he always thought his short hair made him look young and immature. Being only in his thirties, he had risen quickly in the ranks of his hospital and now even the FBI, but he still felt his age disadvantaged him. His superiors looked down on him for his early successes, so Hannibal did what he always did– defy their expectations again and again.

He poured himself another glass of pinot before picking up the next unsolved and missing person case file. He had started with the victim’s cases, going over them in detail over two days. He was letting the information ruminate in his mind while he continued to process through the numerous other unsolved files. He sorted them into two groups, possible connection with the Fairy and no connection. He had already found three people he had eaten within the missing person files. He smiled at his hidden work showing up in front of him months later.

He scanned through a few more files until one caught his eye. A man, John Graham, had been shot in his home, date of death uncertain. His son, Will Graham, was the lead suspect in the case, but had gone missing before arrests could be made. Cause of death was from a gunshot, but the autopsy reported John Graham having a mysterious bite mark. It was ruled unimportant and there were no photos. Only a note of the bite located on the man's neck.

“I wonder…” Hannibal muttered to himself as he flipped through the file.

Evidence showed the son had been present for his father’s murder. His DNA all over the body as well as a bloody track fitting the boy's size. The officers had simply placed the claim on the boy. But ballistics told Hannibal a different story. According to the files, Mr. Graham had been shot at point blank while he stood in his living according to blood splatters, but the angle of the shot was what interested Hannibal. The shot had entered the man's chest and traveled at a slight downward trajectory. Downwards. That meant the gun had been angled down on Mr. Graham.

Hannibal flipped back to the autopsy page, standing right at six foot, Mr. Graham's killer would have to have been taller than six feet, in order for the bullet to enter the man’s chest and travel downward. Was the son taller than his father? Hannibal flipped through the file hoping to find more info, instead he stumbled on an angel. Or a picture of an angel.

“Mano Dievas.” Hannibal whispered in awe of the beautiful boy. He held the photo up to better light. The picture was a faded high school photo of the suspect Will Graham. He could have been the subject of Michelangelo’s David. His face sculpted from perfection without the hardlines of time. His eyes were a brilliant blue but terribly sad, with a faraway look. Hannibal could lose himself in their sea of blue.

He forced himself to put the photo down. He grabbed his glass and drained the pinot down in one swallow. The boy was beautiful and utterly distracting. Hannibal compelled himself to focus on the case, and not the lovely figure. “He’s beautiful, but is he taller than his father?”

Hannibal found no reference to height in the record. He needed more information. He found the school’s number and called. “Hello, my name’s Dr. Lecter and I work with the FBI. I was wondering if I could access a prior student’s records? Yes, the name is Will Graham.”

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After playing up his charm for the past two hours, Hannibal was now finally printing the documents from the school. He was surprised at the amount, there were so many files for one so young. It contained the boy’s school records, a brief synopsis of medical history, and a portion of his late father's finances. Hannibal raised an eyebrow at the amount of times the boy switched schools. He wondered if any of the school transfers had been the boy’s fault. It didn’t seem like the kid had ever been expelled. The brief synopsis of the father’s financial and housing records proved to Hannibal, the constant upheaval had not been Will Graham’s fault, but rather the result of his father’s inability to keep a job.

Reading through the boy’s medical records, he found several interesting notes. One, Will was diagnosed as an empath. Too many mirror neurons firing, making it hard for him to distinguish between his own feelings and the feelings of another. Secondly, many of his teachers and other professionals had speculated he was on the spectrum, but his father had adamantly refused to have him tested. Thirdly, and most importantly, Will only stood at 5' 8", making it impossible for him to have shot his father with a downward trajectory unless he held the gun above his head or stood on a stool while he fired the gun. Hannibal smiled at the thought of a boy pausing in the midst of a rageful murder to stand on a box to shoot his victim. It just didn't fit, because the beautiful Will was innocent.

Hannibal had found many reasons why the boy was innocent within the police report, there was the issue of blood on the window. If Will had broken into the trailer and cut himself on the glass, there should be a track of blood throughout the house. Instead, the police found a small set of bloody tracks in the bedroom from the middle of the room to the window, where the majority of the blood had pooled.

The police had assumed Will had somehow managed to stop the bleeding before exiting his room. But Hannibal didn't buy it. It was obvious that the boy had tried fleeing the house through the broken window and stepped on some of the sharp glass shards.

Also, if he had broken into his own house, where were his shoes? If he'd been kicked out of the house, Hannibal doubted the boy would have left without his shoes and wallet. All which were found untouched at the trailer.

Hannibal rubbed his temple. The detectives had done some lazy work and had pinned it on the easiest target. Hannibal added the names of the officers on the case to his rolodex. It was rude of them to assume justice into their own hands. Perhaps he would teach them a lesson.

Hannibal read through several more pages until he stumbled on a series of dates that made him stand from his seat: Will's attendance dates of his last school.

Could it be possible?

Hannibal searched frantically through the piles of papers now in sloping stacks all over his tables and chairs. Where had he put that paper?

Finally, he found it, wedged under his empty and forgotten wine glass: the moon cycle chart.

He quickly scanned for the date he was looking for. It was there.

He pulled his phone out and texted Alana and Crawford.

I think I may know the Fairy's location.

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Jack's office still smelled burnt, but there was an electric current running throughout the room. The audience of three were tense with anticipation, Jack sat at his desk looking impatient, Alana beside Beverly, trying her best to give Hannibal encouraging looks, while Beverly pensively studied the files.

Hannibal contained his excitement over his break in the case with a calm demeanor. He was walking them through the Graham case, laying out expertly why he doubted Will was the killer, but rather the Tooth Fairy.

Jack rubbed his brow, he looked frustrated, "Ok, what you're saying is we have another potential victim? John Graham."

"We have two." Hannibal clarified.

"What do you mean?" Alana asked, flipping through her file.

"The boy, Will Graham, is missing. It could be that he was our first victim taken."

“Ok,” Beverly studied the new information but impatiently wondered, “How does this get us any closer to the Fairy’s whereabouts?"

"The dates of their arrival and disappearance,” Hannibal pointed them out, “They just moved to the area. Two days before a full moon."

Jack’s pupils dilated, obviously connecting Hannibal’s train of thought, “That’s not much time.”

“No it isn’t. Either he followed them all the way from,” Hannibal checked the file, “Biloxi, Louisiana, or–”

"They moved right into his neighborhood,” Jack stood, immediately moved to action, “Beverly start running the profile on residents and workers in the area. I want a list of people. If we have to knock on every single door, we do so.”

“He probably keeps the same habits and would appear as a loner,” Alana added, "We might ask residents if they've seen anyone like that. Agent Katz, mind if I help you write up a questionnaire?”

Beverly’s accepted the doctor’s help, “I would appreciate it, Dr. Bloom.”

Alana and Beverly stood and left the room discussing detail points of the profile. Hannibal stood to follow them, but Jack gestured for him to sit. Hannibal obliged.

“This could be it, Dr. Lecter.”

“Please, call me Hannibal,” Hannibal smiled as Jack seemed to relax, “And I just hope he hasn’t moved locations. It's been almost three years.”

“A killer like the Tooth Fairy will have a home base,” Jack surmised, “He’s been kidnapping and murdering for too long not to. He probably has a barn or a house.”

Hannibal nodded in agreement. He himself had his own kill room in his basement, which he was slowly filling with more equipment. He wanted to buy all the equipment at once, but he worried that he might end up on some agency’s list for his questionable purchases. Meat hooks and large freezers weren't normal everyday purchases.

“I want your eyes, Hannibal,” Jack interrupted his thoughts, “You seem to spot things my agents missed.”

Hannibal shrugged humbly, “A fresh pair of eyes was all that was required.”

“Would you consider accompanying us as we canvas?” Jack asked somewhat shrewdly.

Never look a gift horse in the mouth, Hannibal thought. “I’d be delighted to accompany you.”

Jack nodded, obviously pleased by Hannibal’s response. "We'll do some neighborhood walks over the next week. And maybe some house visits. See if anyone has seen or heard anything."

"Or we run right into our man," Hannibal hoped. He sincerely hoped to be able to see or even talk to this Tooth Fairy. For his own research purposes obviously.

"Possibly. I would rather lay a trap for him, but the bureau is demanding answers and we’re grasping at straws."

Crawford paused for a moment, surveying Hannibal as if judging his credibility, then decided in his favor, “There was another family murdered two nights ago.”

Hannibal cocked his head. This was new information. He felt as if he were one of the few privy to it. He sat straighter in his seat, “Definitely the Fairy?”

“Yes, full moon and the coroner report indicates the same teeth marks. The state department is in an uproar over the murders. They want him caught.”

Jack ran a hand over his head. Hannibal could see the weight of stress on him. “That’s a lot of pressure,” Hannibal sympathized.

Jack made a small laugh, “It’s my job. But I want it solved. Either arrest him or shoot the sick son of a bitch dead. I’d put a bullet in his head the first chance I got.”

Hannibal was happily surprised at Jack’s venom towards the serial killer. Such passion made manipulation easier. He would appear a reasonable, yet supportive ally in this, “I’m sure we would all rest better knowing a killer has gotten his just reward.”

Jack nodded in agreement. Hannibal felt his comradery with the director was growing steadily stronger. If he played his cards right, Jack Crawford would become blinded and bound to Hannibal’s own dark machinations.

“Well, we will see what the future brings,” Jack stood, reaching out his hand.

Hannibal grasped it, shaking it firmly, “Until then.”

“Until then.”

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

WARNING GRAPHIC DEPICTIONS OF VIOLENCE AND RAPE

Will sat on the couch cradling his treasure box in his lap. It was an old shoe box with the name ‘Will’ written over the top in black sharpie. He held it like it was a precious heirloom. He removed the lid gently and reverently touched the contents.

Inside were two leaves that had blown in through the front door several months ago. Will had found them while cleaning up a puddle of blood that had gotten under a cabinet. He secretly stashed them away before the dragon had seen. They had been soft and green with bits of yellow spots. They had smelled like woods and streams, but now they were brittle and brown.

One of the leaf's edges had crumbled into bits and Will had cried over it. The dragon had found him crying over the broken leaf and had chosen not to punish him. Instead he brought Will another precious item he kept in the box- a pine cone. The cone smelled of forests and trees and fresh air, all the things Will was banned from but desired. Will had loved it so much he had leaped into the dragon’s arms and had kissed him. The dragon had been surprised but quickly realized the influence the gifts held. He gave Will the box and more little gifts soon after.

Will drew the pine cone out and breathed its scent. He set it carefully aside next to the fragile leaves. Inside the box were also a pair of socks which he was only allowed to wear when it was cold. He sometimes would take them out and rub the soft fabric against his face. He loved the texture and wished the dragon would let him wear them more. There was also a quarter from the year he’d been born. He thought it was fateful that two things made in the same year would be trapped in the same place years later.

He removed the paper objects next. Two paper cut outs that Will adored and named: Winston and Buster. Winston was a yellow dog that had been on a dog food ad in the coupon magazine Dolarhyde had tossed to him one day. Buster was a little brown and white bulldog that had been on a carpet cleaning ad in the same magazine. Will had spent an agonizing amount of time slowly tearing the dog pictures out of the magazine. He had read and reread the little booklet over and over. Until he could quote the carpet prices by heart. The only things he continued to return to in the pages were the two dogs. So after long stressful hours of tearing the paper bit by bit, he had his dogs free.

Beneath the coupon book, which lay unused at the bottom of the box, was a treasure that Will didn’t like in his box, but was forced to keep. It was a gift from Dolarhyde, but not one that Will appreciated. A picture. Dolarhyde had posed the boy and himself in front of the portrait

of the great red dragon and had snapped a picture on one of those old cameras that printed and developed the photos immediately. All the other treasures were things Will genuinely liked and might have enjoyed if he was still a regular kid, but the polaroid photo claimed him as the dragon's. He was not normal, he was a little dragon serving the great one.

He carefully set the box beside him on the couch. He looked down at his little friends. "What do you want to do today?"

He leaned down pressing his ear to the crinkled paper as if listening intently for the paper dog to answer. He smiled and moved up once more, "I like that idea. Let's play catch."

He slid to the floor in front of the couch, setting the paper dogs carefully on the floor in front of him. He took the coin from the box and asked his friends, "Are you ready?"

They didn't respond but Will imagined them barking ecstatically in agreement. He happily balanced the coin on his thumb then flicked it high in the air. The coin sailed through the air then fell back to the floor. It landed next to Buster. Will squealed, "Oh, good job Buster, you almost got it."

He kissed the dog on the head and picked up the coin once more, "Let's see if Winston can catch one this time."

He flipped the coin high again. Will's eyes followed it's trajectory, imagining a completely different scene behind his eyes. One with green fields and roaming dogs. The coin landed right on the paper dog and Will clapped with excitement, exclaiming, "You caught it! You caught it, good boy! Good boy, Winston!"

A cabinet slammed loudly, rattling the dishes inside. Will jumped at the sound, his play illusion broken. He looked over in the kitchen where an angry Dolarhyde stood. Will shrunk on his spot, he quickly put his friends and the other treasures back in the box and closed it securely. He didn't know why the dragon was angry, but it usually meant he'd suffer in some manner. He didn't want the dragon's rage to collide with his treasures.

"Will. Come here."

Will immediately stood and walked to the man seething in the kitchen. Will wondered what he did wrong this time. He recounted in his head all the things he was supposed to do.

Clean up the blood from the last full moon. Done.

Make the bed. Done.

Destroy the screaming man's clothes. Almost done. They were currently smoldering in the fireplace.

He stood in the kitchen, eyes cast down in deference, "Yes, great dragon?"

"You're being too loud. Eat your dinner then we'll watch a movie."

“I’m sorry,” Will whispered as the man placed a bowl on the table. The dragon walked to the boy petting his curls before pulling his face up, kissing the boy’s chapped lips, a forceful acceptance of his apology. “Eat quickly,” The dragon breathed lustfully as he parted from Will’s lips.

Will nodded and hurried to the table when the dragon released him. The dragon turned and walked from the kitchen, he’d be waiting in the partitioned area of the house. He would choose the movie they’d watch. They were never real movies, just the home movies Dolarhyde liked to piece together. Will hated them but he didn't have to watch them. He'd be doing *other* activities.

He pushed that thought away and focused on eating his food. The steaming bowl of oatmeal looked delicious and Will was ravenous. He spooned up the hot stuff and filled his empty stomach. He made sure to clean the bowl well, using his fingers and tongue to get every last oat. Once he finished, he took the bowl to the sink and washed it with water. He knew how much the dragon hated messes. While at the sink he gulped down mouthfuls of water. It might be the only clean thing he'd have in his mouth for a while.

He lingered in the kitchen as long as he dared. Then unwillingly left. He stopped by the couch holding his treasure box. He carefully slipped off his only pair of boxers. They had been large on him when the dragon first gave them to him, now they seemed to engulf his shrunk form. He could count his ribs and see his hip bone jutting out. He folded the old material and placed it nestled in the box. He wouldn't need them for the rest of the night.

He left the safety of the living room and walked through the curtained barrier. The dragon was connecting his laptop to the projector. A portable screen filled the empty kill space. Will went and sat at the couch in front of the screen and waited for the dragon to finish. He stared at the floor. The dark hardwood was clean. Will should know, he spent hours each month scrubbing it’s surface. But as he looked at it, he could imagine the pools of blood that covered the floor just a few nights before. He drew his feet up on the couch as if avoiding any residual blood that might still be on the floor.

The movement made the dragon turn. He smiled at the boy. His razor gaze cutting into Will. Will flushed and ducked his head. “Did you eat all your dinner?”

Will nodded, “Yes, thank you, great dragon.”

"Are you ready for a movie?"

"Yes, great dragon," Will licked his lips nervously. He hoped tonight the dragon would just let him suck him off. His ass was killing him from the particularly rough treatment of the last full moon.

"What should we watch?"

Will shrugged, the dragon never listened to his opinions, but he answered nonetheless, "The Garrison's?"

The dragon laughed, "Why do you always choose them?"

Will honestly liked that one because the video showed the victim cutting the dragon's arm before he was killed. Will liked the reminder that the dragon was a man, not a god. It had been so long that when he heard the dragon's grunt of pain in the video, it lit a flame of hope. But he would never admit his reasoning, so instead he lied, "You can see their cat in a couple of the shots."

Dolarhyde shook his head, "You and your animals. You don't need anymore pets, you're loud enough as it is with your paper ones."

Will worried constantly that Dolarhyde would take away his paper friends. He would have to be extra careful not to invoke his wrath. He whispered an apology, "I'm sorry."

"We'll watch the Garcia's," Dolarhyde decided.

Will groaned internally. He hated the Garcia video. Their screams hurt his ears, especially the toddler's. Dolarhyde had woken the child. The little girl shrieked for her mother before being shot. Will couldn't bare the child's pleas. She was so innocent and small, yet the dragon had destroyed her. *Just like he destroyed you* .

No. The dragon hadn't destroyed him, he had done something worse, he had changed him. He had made Will into a killer. Though Will wasn't allowed on the full moon hunts, the dragon always brought prey back for Will. A grotesque form of endearment from the dragon, or maybe a training of sorts. When the dragon killed, so must Will. Since being with the dragon he had killed twenty-two people. Screaming people Will had silenced. Their ghosts haunted him. At first, their faces had appeared to him in waking and sleeping moments. Screaming at him to save them. But now, he couldn't even remember their faces. A chorus of voices followed him, screaming at him to do something. To kill the dragon. But they didn't understand the dragon's power. They didn't see how weak Will was.

Will lowered his head and forced himself to put his feet on the clean, though blood soaked, floorboards. The black shackle tethering him to the house lay stark on his ankle, but the true chain was laid deep in his mind. Whether he picked the Garrison's or the Garcia's, it didn't really matter. The dragon would always be in control. He would always own Will.

The video began, it was a blurry video and the audio was staticky. It made Will's toes curl uncomfortably. He wanted to hum and bite his fingernails, but the dragon hated any noise, so he bit the inside of his cheek and shoved his hands under his legs. He pinned them so they wouldn't move. It was a trick he learned in school, when his teachers yelled at him to stop fidgeting. Now it was of utmost importance that he be still for the great dragon.

The dragon pulled his shirt above his head revealing his broad body which Will lived in constant fear of. Dolarhyde began unbuckling his belt, when he must have changed his mind. He walked up to Will, his belt inches from Will's face. The man towered above him, "Do it."

Will let his hands free from their imprisonment. He worked the stiff leather through the buckle leaving the ends hanging open. He started to pull the belt free, but Dolarhyde stopped him with a touch of his hand. "Leave it, get on with it."

Will obediently stopped. He undid the dragon's button and pulled the metal zipper down. The cock was heavy against the man's underwear. Will palmed one side while leaning in to brush the other side with his nose. He licked at the damp fabric, just as he knew the dragon liked. Dolarhyde made a pleased sound and gripped Will's hair, pressing the boy's face earnestly into his crotch. Will cringed at the overwhelming stench of the dragon's sex and sweat, but continued to mouth around Dolarhyde's thinly clothed dick.

Dolarhyde tugged Will's head back. The boy looked up questioningly at his captor. Dolarhyde trailed his free hand down the boy's face to his parted lips. He dragged the boy's bottom lip down with his thumb. Will opened his mouth wider as he knew the dragon wanted.

"You want it?"

"Yes, great dragon," Will obediently answered. It was the only correct answer.

"Good boy," The dragon purred.

Will couldn't help but smile at the praise, though it made his stomach turn. Will would do practically anything for the man to speak softly to him. If he just did everything the man liked, he'd be rewarded with kindness. *The dragon is kind to me already* , his mind corrected, *you're just too stupid to follow his directions. He has to punish you for being stupid* .

The dragon released Will's hair and pulled his pants and underwear down from his hips, revealing his hardened cock. Without waiting for the dragon's hand to force him, Will leaned forward and took the cock in his mouth. He sucked at the head, before taking the length deeper in his mouth.

"Ah, fuck," The dragon moaned. His hand grasped Will's hair once more and began to move Will's head up and down his cock as he pleased, "Such a good little dragon for me."

Will hummed around the cock in agreement, happy to please the dragon if it meant he'd speak to him so gently. The dragon ceased moving Will's head. He fisted Will's hair painfully as he thrusted his dick deeper in the boy's mouth. Holding the boy still while he fucked the back of his throat, not caring for Will's gagging.

Will squeezed his eyes closed as his eyes watered. Everytime the dragon's cock hit the back of his throat, he gagged. He felt like throwing up, but he felt that every time the dragon was in his mouth. He concentrated on breathing through his nose. In and out, in and out, he could do this. He'd make the man happy then Dolarhyde would hold him in his arms and whisper he was a good boy and he was the perfect little dragon.

So when the dragon pulled from Will's mouth releasing his grip on the boy's hair, Will knew what to do. He turned on the couch and crawled over to the armrest. He placed his elbows on the arm, ducked his head low to his forearms, and arched his back up. He hoped it made the "pretty picture" the dragon was always telling him about. His ass on display for the dragon's taking.

But the dragon's hands didn't come. Will turned his head and looked back at the dragon. The dragon wasn't even looking at him. Instead he was leaning over his laptop, staring at a

webpage Will didn't recognize. The movie on the screen was paused, still showing footage of Dolarhyde stalking the family's home.

Will sat up, not wanting to crouch in his hunched over position if he didn't need to. He was curious as to what had stopped the dragon. Usually the dragon wouldn't stop until he had pounded Will into the couch. Will couldn't help himself, he was too curious. He asked before thinking better, "What is it?"

The dragon slammed his fist on the table making Will jump. The man ripped the cord from the computer's side. The screen went dark, leaving Will and the dragon alone with the only light a greenish glow coming from the laptop screen. The dragon turned on the boy angrily, "What is it? Fucking lies that what it is!"

Will retreated back. Pressing against the couch cushions hoping he'd be enveloped in their safety. Why was the dragon angry? Did he do something wrong? What did he do wrong? Will hugged himself, digging his nails in his arms. He had dark bruises from his unhealthy coping mechanism, but still he stabbed deeper, hoping the pain would erase the dragon's anger.

"Stupid bitch," The dragon cursed angrily at the computer.

"I know, I'm sorry!" Will yelped, hoping to appease the man.

"Not you, idiot," Dolarhyde growled and continued to talk to himself, "Fucking bitch is writing shit. She doesn't know who I am. I am the Great Red Dragon, not a fucking fairy. Shit writing whore."

Will paled at the dragon's curses. If he wasn't the object of anger, he had no idea who was. He hadn't seen the Dragon this angry in a long while. Would he be punished for this? Will realized he was bleeding. The crescent shaped indents on his arm had punctured his skin. He released his arms from his hand's death grip. Little blood droplets formed around the cuts. Will watched with passive interest as the blood slowly gathered and a drop rolled down his arm. The dragon was bellowing and pacing around the room, but Will stayed huddled watching the line of blood travel down his arm.

"Fucking lying cunt. I'll show you who I am. Will, go to bed now," The dragon ordered, breaking Will's trance. He was pulling his shirt back on and doing up his pants.

Will frowned. This wasn't how the night was supposed to go. There was an order to things. He didn't get sent to bed until after the movie. Until after the dragon had fucked him. Was this a trick? Did the dragon want to test him? He didn't move.

"Will, get the fuck up," The dragon yelled as he buckled his jeans.

Will scrunched his face. Did the dragon really want him to leave? Will was certain he'd done something wrong.

The dragon unlocked a cabinet, drawing out the black pistol with the silencer. He tucked it in the back of his jeans. He went for his boots when he spotted Will still huddled on the couch. His looks turned black.

“What do you not understand about going to bed?” The dragon roared, jolting Will. “Get up and go, you stupid whore!”

“B-but, we haven’t finished. T-the movie,” Will whimpered.

“Do I care?” The dragon snarled.

“B-but we, b-but we always–”

The dragon backhanded him across the face. Will saw black spots before his arm was yanked and he was dragged off the couch. He scrambled to get his feet under him as the dragon hauled him up the stairs. They reached the room; Dolarhyde threw Will on the floor by the bed.

“Stay,” Dolarhyde spat. His hand was red from Will’s bloody arm, but he didn’t seem to notice.

Will curled in a ball, covering his face with his arms. He wailed, “Where are you going?”

“Hunting,” Was the monster’s only response before slamming the door closed, locking the boy securely inside.

Will listened intently as the dragon made his way down the stairs and out the front door. He allowed himself a shaky breath before crawling to the bed. He climbed on the mattress and pulled the covers over his head. He buried his face into the mattress, breathing in the familiar smell of musky sheets and stale sex. He calmed himself down, enjoying the feeling of the comforter above him.

He concluded that the whole ordeal was his fault. He was too stupid to understand. How many times did Dolarhyde have to tell him? He was a stupid whore. He wasn’t being a good little dragon. When the dragon came back, he’d be better. He would listen better. He would be quiet with his pets. He wouldn’t linger in the kitchen. He would swallow the cock faster. He’d be better. He’d be a good little dragon.

Chapter 3

Hannibal finally found the coffee Jack Crawford liked.

He had been on a mission since he and Jack had started canvassing the neighborhoods to find the man's taste in the delicious beverage. The first day out he brought a lighter blend with chocolate and a hint of raspberries. The man had complemented the drink but hadn't finished it. The next day, Hannibal brought the man a darker blend with simple vanilla syrup. Jack had made a face while drinking it, but had downed the travel mug. So, deducing what he knew, Hannibal made the final winning brew. It was a medium roast with a light addition of caramel with two tablespoons of sugar.

He congratulated himself as Jack downed the last of his drink with a smack of his lips. He placed the travel mug in the car's cup holder. They were currently driving around the town following leads. They had just finished interviewing a hysterical old man who swore up and down he saw a shadowy character flying in the alleyways between buildings. It sounded more like an urban legend than factual to Hannibal, but Jack had called Beverly to investigate it.

They were now traveling out to a Francis Dolarhyde's home. The man was an ex-military who had been honorably discharged. Nothing on his record indicated he was the Tooth Fairy. He simply fit one aspect of the profile and worked within their geographic area. His camera shop had CT cameras that faced the Graham's neighborhood. It was a shot in dark, but they wanted to follow it.

Hannibal was bored with the interviews and the neighborhood walks. He wanted to find the Fairy.

"Did you happen to see the Tattlecrime article?" Hannibal asked, trying to make conversation with the sulky man in the passenger seat.

Jack sighed, "Yes, Freddie Lounds is a thorn in my side. I don't know how she got her info. The cases haven't been publicly connected and the Tooth Fairy name was an inside nickname."

"I thought as much. When I saw her article last night, I was surprised. She fills the body of text with subjective narrative but she has several strands of fact," Hannibal wondered how the journalist had gotten her info. Her article had alerted local news who were now hounding at the FBI heels for more sensational news. Now that the public knew, it made their work harder, distinguishing between the truth and hearsay.

"The damage has been done; so hopefully, the article works in our favor," Jack continued, "He can't be happy with a name like the Tooth Fairy. Maybe he'll make a mistake."

Hannibal hummed his agreement as he turned down a service road. Mr. Dolarhyde lived far enough from the city to be secluded in a patch of woods. They drove up the shaded lane until they saw a two-story house emerge, sitting on a hill. Hannibal glanced at Crawford. The man

was eying the property with a discerning eye. Hannibal could see the wheels turning as Crawford studied the large piece of hidden land, the barns, and large house for a single man.

Jack quickly unbuckled as Hannibal parked and got out of the vehicle. He quickly walked towards the house, Hannibal hot on his heels.

“This area fits, doesn't it?” Hannibal asked, already knowing the answer.

Jack nodded, “Lots of space, no neighbors. It’s a perfect kill zone. What do we know about this Francis Dolarhyde?”

Hannibal quoted what he remembered from the file, “Single white male, 40s, served in the army, honorably discharged at the end of his service. Camera shop in town. People he works with described him as a bit standoffish. Had several negative customer reviews.”

“Diacharged from the army? Might fit your social exclusion theory,” Jack murmured as he climbed the front porch stairs. He stretched his arm out to knock on the front door, but Hannibal snagged his hand before he could pound on the entrance. Jack glared questioningly at Hannibal’s sudden grab.

“He fits very well,” Hannibal pointed at the door. Above the door handle was a bloody handprint as if someone had slammed the door behind themselves.

Jack stepped back, his eyes glinting with the eagerness of a hunter, “Is there more?”

Hannibal quickly looked around and found a partial print on the railing, “Yes, that’s blood – and fresh.”

Jack was already dialing on his cell phone, “I’m requesting back up.”

Hannibal zoned out the phone conversation as he studied the house and the barns. He took a deep inhale, seeing if he could smell anything. He could smell something rotten in the air. He first thought it was manure, but now, more sinister smells came to mind.

Jack touched his shoulder, jerking him from his thoughts. “Tactical is on their way, but I don’t want to risk him getting away. I say we go in. You coming?”

Hannibal wouldn’t miss it. He grinned, “Let’s catch our killer.”

Surprisingly, the door was unlocked. Hannibal raised an eyebrow at the carelessness. Either they were mistaken and Dolarhyde wasn’t their killer or he was an idiot. They entered slowly, Jack with his gun drawn sweeping the large open room. Hannibal stayed back as the agent cleared the first floor. He had no weapon and didn’t have the urgent calling to step in the line of fire.

Instead he wondered after Jack as he moved deeper through the house. There was a sheet dividing the large open room in half. Hannibal pulled it aside. A stench of bleach and blood met his nose. He surveyed the room. A large projector screen took up the majority of the space while the rest of the space was cluttered with cameras and film. Hannibal picked up a

undeveloped roll and gingerly held it up to the light to see. He grinned: the Tooth Fairy was a cinematographer.

Within the film he could see a murder scene playing out. He replaced the film back on the table and shuffled the contents. Under several rolls he found developed photos. Dead bodies, blood splatters, dying victims.

Jack returned from his search, “First floor is clear.”

“He is definitely our killer,” Hannibal gestured to the photos.

Jack studied them, shaking his head. He grumbled under his breath, “Sick son of a bitch”

A creak sounded above them and both of their heads whipped around.

Gun ready in hand, Jack immediately headed for the stairs gesturing for Hannibal to follow him. They quickly scanned the barren rooms upstairs, but returned to the large wooden door at the top of the stairs. It was the only room locked. Jack waved Hannibal behind him.

"Francis Dolarhyde. If you're in there, come out with your hands up!"

There was no answer but Hannibal swore he heard a door close. He shot Jack a concerned look, "Is there another way out of the room?"

Jack frowned, "I'm not waiting for him to get away."

He stepped in front of the door and squared his shoulders. He kick the door. The door burst open as Jack propelled through. The strong man quickly found his standing, scanning the room. The room had no windows and was dark except for a single light fixture.

Hannibal followed quickly after. He nimbly entered the room. There was a large bed taking up the majority of the room. The bed’s blankets and sheets were obviously slept in. Hannibal could smell more blood. Fresh. He pulled the blanket off the bed. The sheets were stained with splotches of fresh blood. Older dried blood stains also covered the sheets. He pointed it out to Jack quietly, “There’s blood. Fresh.”

Jack nodded that he heard as he rounded the on the other side of the bed to a closed door. Hannibal followed after.

“Dolarhyde! If you’re in there, come out!” Jack yelled at the closed door.

Hannibal heard a muffled shuffling from behind the door. There was someone there, waiting. Was it the Tooth Fairy? Hannibal thought the Fairy would attack, not hide. His kills were vicious and violent, there was no way he wouldn’t go down without a fight. So, why was he hiding?

Hannibal took his position by the door. He grasped the handle. He would pull it open while Jack entered. He mouthed, “Ready?”

Jack nodded. Hannibal opened the door as Jack rushed the smaller room.

*

Will was terrified. There were people downstairs. He could hear them talking in low voices. They weren't the dragon. He knew the sound of the dragon's voice.

Were they the dragon's victims? Did he have to kill them? It wasn't a full moon. They had just had a full moon a couple days ago. Why were there people? Where was the dragon?

Will wanted the dragon with him. He needed his familiar smell and touch. He moved from where he was crouched by the door listening back to the bed. The floor creaked as he hid under the covers. He pulled the covers above his head burrowing into the old mattress. It always smelled like the dragon there. It wasn't safe but it was what Will knew.

Will heard the people on the stairs. They had voices like the dragon. *Men* , Will reminded himself. There were men coming up the stairs. They tried the handle and it thankfully stayed locked. He prayed they would just go away.

Suddenly a voice shouted, “"Francis Dolarhyde. If you're in there, come out with your hands up!"

Will panicked. He scrambled off the bed with a thud as he hit the floor. He crawled to the bathroom and closed the door.

They were looking for the dragon. But the dragon wasn’t here. Will didn’t know what to do. Were they going to kill him? Were they going to punish him? Will could imagine the pain two men could inflict on him. His eyes watered as he hid between the sink and the toilet. He used to barely fit, but now his thin form easily squeezed between; tightly curled on himself.

There was a crash in the other room.

They were almost to him! He didn’t want to be here. He just wanted it to be quiet. He wanted to sleep. He covered his head with his arms, willing himself to disappear.

*

Jack was yelling at a figure in the room, “Put your hands up! Put your hands up!”

Jack aimed his gun at a small figure huddled between the sink and the toilet. He was naked and pale with bruises covering much of his body. He hid his face under his arms. There was dried blood on his arms. And his whole body was shaking.

“FBI! Put your hands up!”

Hannibal touched Jack’s arm, “Jack– Jack! That’s not the Tooth Fairy.”

Jack’s furrow creased. He looked frustrated and annoyed, but he lowered the gun slightly, “Come out from there!”

Hannibal raised a hand and stepped in front of Jack, forcing him to lower his weapon fully. He tried to block the agent from the figure's view. He lowered himself into a crouch, hoping

to appear less threatening.

“Hello there, we’re here to help you,” He kept his voice even and calm. It was the voice he used when calming panicking patients at the hospital, “It’s going to be alright. My name’s Hannibal. Can you tell me yours?”

A mop of dirty brown hair slowly rose from their hiding and big pretty blue eyes peeked out from under the arms, staring at Hannibal. He immediately recognized those orbs. He would recognize them anywhere, they were so haunting.

“Will Graham.” Hannibal whispered.

The boy’s wide saucers dilated so much that Hannibal could barely see anymore blue. Hannibal spoke to Jack while keeping his eyes on the cowering boy, “Jack, it’s Will Graham, one of the missing victims. We need to call a medical team.”

“Backup is on their way,” Jack responded gruffly.

“I don’t need a SWAT team Jack, I need an ambulance,” Hannibal studied the boy’s body. He had dark bruises all over his legs and arms. There were bloody hand prints on his arms; Hannibal worried the boy might have internal damage from the dark bruises.

“If we bring an ambulance, all hope of catching Dolarhyde goes out the window. It’ll scare him away.”

“We’ve probably disturbed his area too much already, Jack, I doubt he’s coming back.” Hannibal felt annoyed at the man’s determination to catch the perpetrator. Yes, he wanted the Fairy caught, but not when there was an obviously hurt victim in front of them.

“He might come back, we can set a trap.” Jack persisted.

Hannibal shot a glare behind him, “Why are you delaying medical help?”

“He can wait for a few hours!” Jack explained exasperatedly, “We’ll put him in our car. Or take him to the headquarters.”

Hannibal rose to his feet, turning vehemently to Jack, “I’m a doctor, and I’m telling you, he needs medical attention now.” Jack stepped back, daunted by Hannibal’s threatening demeanor. Hannibal took full advantage, “Call the ambulance.”

Jack narrowed his eyes but conceded, “Fine. Get him off the floor.” Jack left the bathroom, phone in hand. Hannibal listened until he heard Jack asking for medical back-up.

He turned back to Will who was still staring up at Hannibal. He looked terrified. Hannibal lowered himself once more, “Hey, hey, it’s alright. We’re getting you medical help. You’ll be fine.”

He reached out slowly. Will followed the hand with his eyes wearily. "I want to help you. May I touch you?"

Will made no sound but he didn't draw away. Hannibal gently touched the boy's shoulder. Goosebumps spread all over his skin.

"You're cold." Hannibal noted.

Hannibal scooted closer, kneeling on the ground. He pulled his jacket off and wrapped it around the boy's shoulders. He noted the welts across the boy's back and shoulders. He hoped the jacket wouldn't be uncomfortable on his skin. It engulfed the boy's form. The body was so thin and fragile. It reminded him of another young one with eyes just as big though with a smaller and more feminine body.

Mischa.

Hannibal closed his eyes, fighting not to fall into those dark memories. He staved off the feelings of helplessness and misery of those times, but the need to protect persevered. He reached out, not thinking for once and following his emotions. He pulled the boy from his cramped position, drawing him close and hugging him in a protective embrace.

Will made a startled cry but was quickly calmed by a warm chest as Hannibal cradled him in his arms. He gently rubbed the trembling back.

"Shh, it's OK. You're going to be alright."

The boy looked up at him. His thin face starkly different than his rounded features in the old photograph Hannibal had seen. His cheek was badly bruised and his lip cut. The dark circles around his eyes only accentuated his sunken cheeks and his large bug eyes.

He stared up at Hannibal and without any malice whispered, "You smell like blood."

Hannibal raised an eyebrow. It was such a strange thing to say. Surely the boy didn't understand his words. He smiled kindly, "You don't smell very good yourself."

Which was true the boy reeked of sweat and fear. Will frowned at him as if weighing his next words. He spoke carefully , "Are you a dragon?"

A dragon? Was the boy delusional? "No. I'm not a dragon. I'm a person, just like you."

"Do you kill people?"

Hannibal opened his mouth to lie, but Will spoke first, "It's OK, I kill people too."

"What?"

Hannibal felt the blood drain from his face. How could someone so small kill? And did the boy just assume he killed? Did he know Hannibal's secret hobbies? It simply wasn't possible. Hannibal refused to believe it was possible.

Instead of worrying, Hannibal concerned himself with how casually the boy spoke of killing. He held the boy tighter, tucking Will's head under his chin. "Did the man who kept you kill people?"

“Yes, sir.”

Hannibal realized the boy was crying silently, his body seizing with his ragged breathing. He gasped every so often as his silent sobbing continued. He tried to hush him, "Shh, you're safe now."

He looked around the small bathroom for any clothes or towels to wrap the boy in, but it was barren. "Will, do you have any clothes?"

Will nodded as he sniffled.

"Where are they?"

Will opened his mouth as if to speak but no sounds came out. He looked up at Hannibal with terrified eyes.

He couldn't speak. Hannibal felt instantly empathetic towards the kid. He had also been mute for a time. It happened and it was okay. He calmed him, "Shh, you don't have to speak. It's alright. Can you nod yes and no?"

Will nodded his head.

"See, look at that, you're doing great."

For the first time Will tentatively smiled. Hannibal smiled back, "Now it's a little game, ok? Are your clothes upstairs?"

Will shook his head.

"Downstairs?"

A nod.

"Perfect, you are doing wonderfully. Why don't we get up from the floor? Can you stand?"

Will burrowed his face into the taller man's chest. He clung to Hannibal like his life depended on it. His knuckles turned white as he fisted Hannibal's shirt.

"Hey, I'm not leaving. I'm not leaving." Hannibal ducked his head and whispered in the boy's ear, "Would you like me to carry you?"

Will snuggled deeper into Hannibal's torso. He took that as a yes. He carefully slid an arm under the younger's legs as he held Will pressed under his chin. Will was worryingly light Hannibal realized as he rose to standing holding the boy in his arms. He carried the boy out of the bathroom and to the bedroom.

As he approached the bedroom doorway, Will suddenly twisted in his arms. Hannibal grunted as he tried to hold the thrashing body, but Will fell out of his arms to the ground. Will scrambled from the ground back to Hannibal wrapping his arms around the man's legs, like a toddler would a parent.

"Will!" Hannibal stood bizzardly pinned to the spot by the young man clinging to his legs. He gently petted the boy's hair hoping to calm his ragged breathing. "Did you want to walk?"

Will, face still hidden, shook his head 'no' vigorously.

"You want to be carried?" Hannibal clarified, to which Will shyly looked up from Hannibal's thy and nodded.

Hannibal knelt carefully down, disengaging Will from his legs only to have the boy wrap his arms around his shoulders and burrow his face in his neck. Hannibal let the boy calm himself for a few moments before asking, "Are you ready to go?"

The boy didn't respond, but Hannibal could feel a growing patch of wetness on his shirt. "Shh, It's alright. I'm here. You're safe."

Will raised a shaky hand and pointed it at the wall behind Hannibal. He turned and looked where the boy pointed. There was a framed picture. It was a watercolor print which Hannibal recognized from the disturbed artist William Blake.

"The painting?" Hannibal asked, "I believe that painting is called the great red dragon and the woman clothed in the sun."

Will raised his head nodding vigorously.

"Do you want to take it?" Hannibal tried to guess Will’s meaning. The boy frowned and shook his head no. He looked scared.

"You don't like that painting?"

A nod and Will pointed urgently at the painting again. Hannibal studied the painting before guessing again, "The dragon?”

Will nodded enthusiastically.

“You don’t like the dragon.”

Another nod. He pointed at himself then jabbed his finger back at the painting. Then he pointed at the bed, then stared wide eyed at Hannibal. His face was full of hope that Hannibal would understand.

Hannibal spoke slowly, trying to unravel Will’s meaning, "You, the dragon, and the bed?"

Will nodded.

"The dragon and you on the bed?"

A nod.

Hannibal hated where this was going. A naked boy locked in a bedroom with bloody sheets. He hated thinking about what the boy had been through. He didn’t want to ask the boy such

questions, not when he couldn’t speak and as he clung to Hannibal.

He skipped to a lighter question, "The man who kept you is a dragon?"

Will nodded.

“Well the dragon isn’t here. And he’s not coming back.”

Will scrounge up his face in disbelief. He shook his head and opened his mouth but couldn’t form words.

"The man, Dolarhyde, isn't coming back. You won't see him again." Hannibal assured him.

Will laughed an ugly choking sound that quickly turned into tears as he shook his head. He didn't believe Hannibal. Hannibal sighed, "We need to get you out of here. I can carry you downstairs. "

Will shook his head frowning. He pointed at the painting then at the ground. He angrily tapped the floor.

“You want to stay here?” Hannibal asked.

Will looked incredulously at Hannibal then pointed at the painting.

“The dragon wants you to stay here?”

Will looked relieved Hannibal understood. He nodded and rested his head back on Hannibal’s chest. Exhausted from communicating. Hannibal held him for a moment before deciding he couldn’t let Will live in fear of this dragon anymore. He stood, hefting the boy up.

“You don’t have to listen to the dragon anymore. You’re leaving with me now.”

Will whined, but Hannibal cradled him close as he walked out the prison of a room.

*

Will thought he might be dreaming. There was a beautiful blonde man holding him. He hadn't hit him or yelled at him or fucked him. Will couldn't believe his luck.

He had been terrified when the large man with the gun burst into the room. He had no place to hide and didn't know what to do. but then the other man appeared and calmed the yelling man down. He had made him leave then took Will into his arms. He spoke so softly. Will hadn't meant to tell him he smelled like blood, but they were the only words his brain supplied him. He had responded so graciously Will immediately felt ashamed.

Now, Will couldn't believe he was disobeying the dragon. He had told him to stay now he was leaving the room in the arms of the beautiful kind man.

He spoke so gently and held him in all the ways he craved the dragon would touch him. Will could smell the blood and death around the angelic man. He knew he was dangerous, but not

in the same way the dragon was. The dragon smelled like terror and pain. The kind man smelled like blood and warmth. Maybe because Will was wrapped in the man's jacket, maybe because he was cradled in his arms; Will felt safe. He nestled further into the man's neck hoping he didn't anger the man with his fidgeting.

The man hushed him and spoke in low tones, "There's stairs, Will, it may be bumpy, just keep your head on me."

Why was he so considerate? Will could stay in his arms forever if it meant he'd keep him safe and protected, even from bumpy stairs. They made it down the stairs without jostling Will too much. Hannibal set him on the couch and knelt on the ground beside him. Will reluctantly let go of the warm man. Hannibal tucked the jacket closer to his body, covering his exposed form. He gently rubbed a hand up and down Will's arm.

"There, darling. We made it," Hannibal smiled at Will, making him blush red. He didn't deserve such kind words. He ducked his head down but Hannibal tenderly touched his chin, prompting him to look up.

"Can you show me where your clothes are? You can point if you want."

Will looked at his box lying hidden partially under the couch. Hannibal followed his gaze and spotted the cardboard box. He reached for it. Will felt the sudden urge to rip it from the man's hands. That was his box. It was the only thing he had. What if the man smashed it? What if he threw it away?

But Hannibal simply placed the box in the boy's lap. Will clutched it, looking worriedly at the man. Hannibal smiled patiently, "Are your clothes in there, Will?"

Will blinked, remembering that was what they were looking for in the first place. How did he forget? He felt stupid; he bit the inside of his cheek. *Don't forget what he says. Or he'll beat you or worse, leave you .*

With shaky hands he opened the box and took out his shorts. He held them out to the man.

Hannibal frowned at the dirty piece of fabric. His lip curled in disgust. Will whimpered at the man's expression. Was he angry? Hannibal moved his hand and Will flinched back afraid the man would hit him.

But no hit came. His eyes flickered up. Hannibal was still kneeling beside him but the anger was gone from his face. "I'm sorry, mylimas, I'm not angry. I just want you to have more clothes. I'm not angry with you."

Will breathed out a sigh of relief. He let his body relax. The man wasn't angry. Hannibal took the clothing and helped Will put his feet through the holes and pull the worn and stained fabric up his legs. The kind man touched the black box shackled around his ankle, but didn't activate it, much to Will's relief.

Once he had the shorts on, Will slipped the jacket off his shoulders and held it out to the man.

Hannibal frowned, "No, you can keep it." He helped Will slip his arms into the long sleeves. He looked like a child playing dress up in his father's clothes. Hannibal rolled the sleeves up so Will could use his hands.

Jack walked in on the phone. Will shrunk on the couch, pulling his legs close to his chest. He eyed the talking man with fear.

Jack gestured for Hannibal to come over to him and Hannibal he went, but not before patty Will lightly on the knee. "I'll be right over there, you're safe now."

Will didn't really believe him. But he couldn't do or say anything to keep him close so he watched with weary eyes as Hannibal strode over to the yelling man.

"I told them to come up the drive without the sirens. There may be a chance we can clear the scene and still set a trap."

Hannibal nodded. "Thank you for calling an ambulance," He turned and spoke low so the boy wouldn't hear, "He's been beat badly and I can see signs of sexual assault."

Jack looked at the kid hiding on the couch, hugging Hannibal's plaid jacket tightly around himself. "He went missing two years ago. The tooth fairy's had him for a while. Why isn't he dead?"

"He's terrified of the man, he called him a dragon," Hannibal paused. He wasn't sure if he should develge too much information. He decided it was best for the boy to tell the director the truth. Jack would probably find out eventually., "He also said he's killed people. I don't know how much is true. He's non-verbal at the moment."

"Can't speak or won't?" Jack growled.

"Give him time," Hannibal said defensively, "He's been through a traumatic event."

"Or he's a cold blood killer," Jack insisted.

Hannibal stopped himself from strangling the man. He took a breath willing his fists to loosen. "Do you not see him? He needs a doctor, not a prosecutor."

"He'll need a lawyer. A good one too," Jack dismissed him with a wave, "The medics are here."

The ambulance was indeed pulling in. Hannibal was raging internally at Jack's cold demeanor. He could brush off Jack's jabs at his protective nature, but how could he ignore the boy's obvious wounds?

Jack went to greet the medics while Hannibal returned to the boy who was lying curled on the couch.

"Will?" Hannibal sat next to the boy, placing a warm hand on his leg, "Darling, the medics are here to look after you. Why don't we go to them?"

Will crawled into the man's lap. Will hoped it was OK to seek the man's comfort. Hannibal welcomed him, rocking him gently. Will let a little content sigh as he buried his head in Hannibal's chest.

The medics entered the house, rolling in a gurney. Will let a high pitch whine as he realized there were more people in the house. Why were there so many people? Where was the dragon?

The two EMTs smiled at Hannibal holding the boy. The lady pulled on medical gloves and spoke to Hannibal, "I hear you're a doctor."

Hannibal nodded, "Yes. Emergency surgeon"

"Does he have any broken bones?"

"None, that I can tell. He has heavy bruising around his ribs. They may be fractured or simply bruised. He'll need a CT scan."

The woman nodded, surveying the boy who refused to look up from his hiding spot; clutching Hannibal's shirt in fear. "Think you can get him on the gurney?"

Hannibal glanced down at the boy, it would take some convincing to make him let go. But the young man needed to go to the hospital. Hannibal sighed, "I'll try."

He brushed a hand through Will's dirty hair, hoping to prompt the boy to look up, but Will refused. He kept his face hidden. "Will, we need to go to the hospital. I'm going to put you on the gurney. I'm not leaving. I promise."

Will shook his head stubbornly and keened loudly. The EMT's eyes turned soft. She voiced softly, "Hey, there sweetheart. It's OK. We're just gonna get you loaded up. OK?"

Will's mind was reeling. He couldn't leave the house. The dragon would find him and punish him. Why didn't they understand?

Hannibal shifted to stand, but Will violently slammed his body against his chest. Making him sit back down on the seat. Hannibal grunted in surprise, "Will!"

Will worried he hurt the man. He wanted to tell him he was sorry that he didn't mean to, but suddenly hands were on him pulling him from the warm man.

Will screamed and thrashed as the EMTs pulled him off Hannibal. He kicked and writhed trying to free himself but the hands held him with iron grips. He tried biting and scratching but the people were too far away. He couldn't make sense of what was happening.

He could hear the kind man yelling, and then there was a sharp pain in his arm. A rush of dread filled his system as he felt a cold liquid enter his arm. They had shot him– drugged him. They were going to rape him. He knew it. They were going to rape him and beat him and lock him away from the kind man. Will sobbed as his world began to swim and his vision went dark.

Chapter 4

Hannibal was furious.

The boy had quite violently pushed him back causing the EMTs to jump in and intervene. Hannibal had tried to wave them off but they must have interpreted his gesture as an invitation because they pounced on the boy dragging him back

Now, Will fought desperately to stay with Hannibal. He gnashed his teeth and kicked but the EMTs who held him fast.

Hannibal was on his feet trying to reach the boy, "Stop!"

But they didn't listen, the other EMT, a large burly man, was reaching for a syringe in his bag.

Hannibal found himself yelling, "You're hurting him! He's just scared!"

But his voice was lost amongst Will's screams. Blood curdling screams of an animal. The technician plunged the syringe into the boy's arm. Will's eyes widened and his screams turned to sobs as his body collapsed on the floor, limp.

The female EMT, still held him down, her body over the lifeless form. Hannibal yanked her away from Will. "Get off him!"

She stumbled back at Hannibal's strength. "Hey! What was that for-"

"Do you realize you may have caused him more harm than good?"

Hannibal kneeled down beside the unconscious crumpled body, checking his vitals. He was breathing and his pulse was normal. Hannibal breathed out a sigh of relief.

"Sir, he was attacking you," The woman tried to reason.

"He couldn't speak, he was trying to communicate," Hannibal spat back.

"He looked like he was about to punch you," The large EMT grumbled.

"I think I can take a punch from a starved and fragile boy," Hannibal retorted. He shifted Will to lie more comfortably on his side, ensuring the boy’s airways were not restricted. "What did you give him?" Hannibal demanded, worried about an allergic reaction.

"It's a simple sedative." The man said defensively.

"What kind?" Hannibal repeated.

"Midazolam. It was a small dose, he should wake up in a couple minutes."

As if on cue, Will stirred slightly. His chapped pink lips parted and he moaned. “Someone get him water,” Hannibal ordered.

Jack stepped in, having observed the whole scene, “There’s water in the ambulance. I don’t want the scene disturbed more than it’s already been and it would be best to get him to a hospital.”

Hannibal wanted to argue, but he knew Jack was right. The sooner they got Will out of the house the better. He nodded, “Fine, let's move him.”

The EMTs rushed to pull the gurney close as Hannibal scooped the boy up. He laid Will gently down on the cushioned cart as the EMTs began to secure the boy in. Hannibal hated to see Will strapped down, but he knew it was regular transportation procedure.

The EMTs brushed Hannibal away as they prepared to leave. He stood distantly, not quite sure how to intervene. He didn't want to leave the boy, but he knew Jack would want him on the scene. He stared at Will's tear stained face as he made a little whining noise that the EMTs didn't notice. There were perspiration drops forming on his forehead and his eyes fluttered under his eyelids. No one seemed to see him or care for him.

He turned to Jack, typing on his phone, "Jack, I'm going with them."

Jack looked up, surprised, "Why?"

"He'll know more about Dolarhyde. He seemed to trust me. I could get him to talk." He didn't mention the fact he felt he needed to protect the boy.

Jack nodded shrewdly. "He could be a key witness. Get me information."

That's when the shrieking started.

Hannibal whipped around. The EMTs were half out the door looking dumbfounded as Will screamed and thrashed on his bindings.

Hannibal rushed to the gurney. He yanked the gurney back into the house. The boy immediately stopped screaming, his cries turning into sobs. Under his crying, Hannibal could hear him repeating a mantra over and over.

"I'll be good. I won't leave. I won't leave. I'll be good. I'll be good."

Hannibal quickly began to unstrap the boy from the gurney. The EMTs tried to argue but Hannibal just growled at them. He hauled the drugged boy to sit upright and began checking him for signs of injury. Will managed to stay up, his eyes were glazed and wandering. His body swayed and his head tipped back. Hannibal caught him before he fell back on the gurney, leaning him forward on his chest.

"He probably just had a psychological break," the larger technician tried to reason.

Hannibal shook his head, still running his hands over the boy's body. "He was sedated. He should have stayed docile. Something triggered it."

His hands ran down the boy's leg until he came to the black box still shackled. His stomach twisted as he touched the thing. Will's whole body jerked in response.

“Is that a shock collar?” The female tech asked horrified.

Hannibal didn’t respond; his only concern was Will. He laid the boy on his back.

"Scissors," Hannibal ordered. The EMT dutifully handed him their medical shears. Hannibal slid the cold metal between the pale ankle and the leather strap. He cut the damn thing away. He tossed it away from the boy. Letting it fall with a clunk on the ground. The boy's ankle was blistered from where the device had shocked him; his skin raw from where it had rubbed his skin.

Hannibal decided at that moment, he was not going to let Will out of his sight. He gathered the boy into his arms and carried him outside. The EMTs followed him quickly. They silently loaded the empty gurney, looking guilty as Hannibal climbed into the back. He cradled the boy, holding him close as Will's head sagged on his shoulder.

*

Will woke to the sound of beeping. His eyes hurt to open and his head pounded. There were bright lights above him. He turned his head to the side hoping to block out the light. The movement only made his head ache harder. He groaned.

"Will?" A voice asked.

Will froze. That was not the dragon. He realized instantly that the bed he lay on was not the dragon’s, nor was the room the enclosed space he's inhabited for what felt like forever.

A warm hand covered his own. He wanted to jerk away but his limbs felt heavy. He remembered the sick feeling of being drugged. The dread of losing his autonomy. Where was he now? When would that voice turn cold and hands begin to hurt?

The voice spoke again, "Will, You are at the hospital. I'm Hannibal Lecter with the FBI. We found you locked in Francis Dolarhyde's house. You're safe now."

The FBI? Hannibal? Why did that name sound so familiar? Why was the man's voice like from a dream?

Will managed to crack his eyelids. Above him stood a serious looking blonde man. His hair falling across his brow. For some reason Will knew it was usually pulled back. But the man was in distress, so his hair fell into distress as well.

The man saw him peeking and his features shifted. His concern slipped into a smile that made Will feel bubbly inside. The man stroked his face gently, "There you are Mylimasis."

Mylimasis? Suddenly the smile and kind words formed the man's face. He was the kind man! Hannibal was the one who held him so gently and spoke softly. Will remembered how he had clothed him and carried him.

He thought he had lost the man. He couldn't quite remember what happened. He had been trying to tell the man something and then hands– terrible hands were gripping him, hurting him.

He trembled at the thought. He turned his face into the man's hand, assuring himself Hannibal was still there.

"There, you're safe now," Hannibal comforted, still gently stroking the boy's face. "Nothing's going to hurt you now."

Will doubted that, but he liked when the man said it. It made it sound almost true. Hannibal was still speaking, Will tried to pay attention.

"You're at St. Mary's Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland. It's two in the afternoon on Tuesday. You are completely safe here. You thankfully did not have any broken bones, just heavy bruising. You'll get plenty of rest and medicine and heal quickly. You have an IV in your arm," Hannibal reached over and lightly touched Will's arm where the needle entered his vein.

Will seized up. There was a needle in his arm. Needles meant drugs and drugs meant pain. Will jerked his arm determined to get the needle out of him, but a stronger hand stopped him.

"Will, it needs to stay in a little longer. We are giving you pain medicine as well as several antibiotic treatments and fluids. You need those to heal quickly."

Will felt tears fill his eyes and slip down his cheeks. He uttered a strangled sob. He hated the feeling in his arm. He wanted it gone. He tried to move his hand again to yank the offending thing out, but Hannibal once again caught his arm and diverted it in another direction. Will tried to sit up but was gently pushed down. Hannibal sat on the edge of the bed. He placed his arms across the boy's chest, his hands resting on Will's shoulders, and gently bore some of his weight down on Will, hoping the pressure would calm him.

Hannibal hated how the boy cried. He hated having to force him to stay put. It felt disrespectful, but he knew it would help the younger man. He tried to distract him.

"Will, I need to ask you some questions, do you think you can answer them?"

Will struggled for a second more, but the heavy weight of Hannibal eventually calmed him. He sniffled but nodded.

"Would you like some water? I'm sure you're thirsty."

Hannibal reached over to the side table and picked up a cup of water with a straw. Will eyed it uncertainly, but he licked his dry lips.

"W-water?"

Hannibal nodded, "Yes, water. Would you like a drink?"

He held the straw close to Will's lips. Will pursed his lips and shook his head, "Drugs."

Hannibal frowned and shook his head, "No, it's just water. See?" He took a sip of the water. He smacked his lips with a satisfied sigh, "Just water. Very refreshing."

Will eyed him suspiciously but after a moment he parted his lips in invitation. Hannibal carefully placed the straw between his lips. Will sipped. At the taste of the cold water, he tried sitting up– eager to drink more. Hannibal smiled at the boy's change. He let him sit up and with the help of several fluffed pillows, until he was propped comfortably upright.

Hannibal held the cup as Will finished the rest. "Would you like some more?"

Will nodded shyly, "Yes, please. Thank you, sir."

"I'm going to go over there," he gestured to the room's sink, "I want you to stay right here, alright? Don't touch the IV."

Hannibal worried Will would pull the IV as soon as he turned his back. But he couldn't hover over the boy forever. He stood, filled up the cup, and returned to Will. The young man was glaring pensively at the tube in his arm.

Will wondered if he was dreaming. Maybe the dragon had drugged him and he was imagining all this. Maybe he was lying in a pool of blood while his mind kept him locked in this fantasy. A fantasy where he was rescued and cared for. He had imagined it before, never so detailed, never so wonderful, but still possible.

"Will?" Hannibal called the boy's attention.

Will blinked from his thoughts, looking up to Hannibal. Hannibal held the cup out to Will, "Would you like to hold it?"

If the man was a figment of his imagination, he should play along, right? Will nodded, reaching a shaky hand out. Hannibal placed it in his grasp and helped him brace the cup against his chest. "Are you hungry Will?"

"No, sir," Will whispered, worrying his lip with his teeth. He was dreaming, but no one was kind enough to give him water *and* food. He held the water tighter. Would Hannibal take away his water if he asked for food? He didn't want to risk his dream turning into a nightmare.

Hannibal gave him a critical look, but didn't argue. He pulled a chair closer to the bedside and sat, "I have a few more questions, Will. Do you think you can answer them?"

"Yes, sir."

"You can call me Hannibal, Will. I don't mind."

Will stared blankly at him. Why did his mind insist on creating a perfect human? It would be easier if his mind created the devil. Less cruel in the long run.

Hannibal thankfully moved on, "Are you in pain anywhere?"

Will shook his head. Pain was relative. Right now, he felt better than he had in ages. Another reason he was probably dreaming.

"Do you know what month it is? Or the date?"

Now his mind was mocking him. Of course he didn't know what month it was. Much less the year or date. His time passed with the phases of the full moon, kill, wait. Full moon, kill, wait. It was that simple. Will didn't know how to answer. His words were getting jumbled in his head. He tried to speak but only the words "Twenty-two, sir," Slipped out in a little whisper.

Hannibal raised an eyebrow, "What did you say?"

"Twenty-two moons. Maybe more, sir."

Hannibal nodded in understanding, "Do you know the lunar calendar? What month is it on the moon cycle?"

Will shook his head. He didn't know such things. He repeated himself hoping the kind man would understand, "Twenty-two moons. Full moons. Next will be twenty-three."

"Well, you've done an excellent job keeping count of the moons. I'm proud of you, Will. But I'd like to tell you the current date."

Hannibal told him. Will was slightly taken aback by the year. It had been nearly three years? It felt both too long and too short of a time.

Hannibal drew him from his thoughts with another question, "Do you know where Francis Dolarhyde went?"

Will whimpered and ducked his head down, "Hunting, sir."

"Does he hunt a lot, Will?"

"Dragons hunt on full moons," Will parroted words not quite his own.

"Dragons. Dolarhyde is a dragon?"

Will nodded, not able to look up at the older man.

"You said dragons. Are there others?"

A curt nod and Will was tense, his brow furrowed. He turned his head from Hannibal, he couldn't bear facing the man.

Hannibal spoke slowly as if stepping on thin ice that was about to shatter, "Will. I have no judgment. I just want you safe. Are you a dragon too?"

Will let out a choke sob that was dying to escape, "I'm his little dragon."

"Shhh," Hannibal scooted closer, placing a calming hand on Will's shaky hand. Hannibal gently pried the water cup from Will's hand before it split all over the young man. He placed it on the side table.

Will hadn't realized he was trembling. But now his breath became short and shallow. He couldn't get enough air. He looked at Hannibal in a panic.

"Shh, deep breaths Will. You're having a panic attack. You are safe and nothing is going to hurt you. I won't let it."

"He's going to get me," Will wept.

Hannibal moved quickly, not out of his own volition, but rather out of an instinctual need to help the boy. He sat on the edge of the bed and pulled the boy into a tight hug. Will's small torso melted into Hannibal's chest even as the boy heaved sobs.

"He's not going to get you. I won't let him." Hannibal assured as he petted the boy's matted hair and ran a soothing hand up and down his back.

"But you're not real!" Will wailed. His hands fisting the front of Hannibal's shirt desperately.

"Yes, I am darling. I'm very real."

"No, I just made you up! You're in my imagination." Will insisted.

"No," Hannibal pressed the boy's ear to his chest, "Do you hear my heart beating?"

Will's sobbing were muffled as he was cocooned.

"It means I'm real."

He covered the boy's shaking hand with his own, "Do you feel my hand over yours? It means I'm real."

Will's trembling subsided.

Hannibal leaned down and touched his lips to the boy's forehead, "Do you feel the breath of my voice?"

Will stilled entirely, leaning into Hannibal's embrace.

"It means I'm real." Hannibal whispered tenderly into Will's locks.

Will looked up at Hannibal with trepidation in his eyes. "My imagination is never like this, sir."

"No? Why is that?" Hannibal asked kindly.

"It's always cold. But you're warm," Will whispered as if telling a secret.

"And why do you think I'm warm?"

“B-because you’re real?” Will asked, not quite sure of himself.

“Yes. And that means you are not imagining this,” Hannibal concluded.

He wasn’t dreaming? But it felt like a dream. Will looked past the man to the room around him. He studied the dull blue walls and recognized familiar cleaner scents. His ears moved past the pounding of his own heart and listened to the sounds of movement beyond his hospital room. Surely his mind couldn’t recreate such things. He definitely would never have imagined the man holding him now.

Hannibal was an enigma. Will’s intuition told him he was dangerous, yet his empathy screamed that Hannibal was safe. That he would protect him. Will was comforted by his presence. He wanted to believe he was real, but he was afraid he’d be hurt when his fantasy collapsed. When he woke up to pain and suffering.

But Will had been hurt plenty already. What was a little more?

He tucked his head beneath Hannibal’s chin, breathing deeply Hannibal’s scent of coffee and strange unknown spices. He chose to live in this dream– however long it lasted.

He whispered a prayer, “Please be real.”

Chapter 5

Will had never been to a hospital before. His father had taken him to one specialist when he was very young but nothing else. His father hadn't liked doctors. He said they lied about Will's brain. He said they had told him something was wrong with him. Will thought there was probably something wrong with him.

He knew he didn't like what he was wearing. Clothed in an oversized hospital gown, the fabric was itchy and irritated his skin. He was so used to wearing other than the shorts that the extra fabric was uncomfortable and almost unbearable. It touched his back and shoulders, irritating the welts still healing. Will wished he could wear his boxer shorts, but they were nowhere to be found. At least the gown offered him a place to hide. He tucked his legs inside the fabric as he hugged himself, careful not to bug the IV. While the tube was still in his arm, he was no longer attached to the IV drip. He hated the thing but Hannibal had told him not to touch it. The man had been so kind, Will didn't dare to disobey him or make him angry. He wished Hannibal would return and hold him again.

The older man was outside his room talking to someone. No one else had come into the room. Will had hoped Hannibal would lock the door and stay with him forever, but the older man insisted that Will had to meet the other doctors and nurses. Will was positive they would tell him he was messed up– that his brain was abnormal. They would give him shots and hurt him. Maybe they'd have their way with him like the dragon did. Doctor's didn't want to help him, they just wanted to experiment on his brain. Maybe they would cut him open and remove his bad bits. But they probably couldn't fix him. It would just hurt. He deserved to be hurt.

Will dug his nails into his arm as he worked himself into a panic. He watched the shadow of Hannibal's back through the frosted glass.

A moment later, Hannibal returned, smiling at Will's self made chrysalis. Will uncurled and reached for Hannibal, a soft whine coming from his throat. The older man immediately came to him. The younger wrapped his arms around the man and buried his head under his chin. Hannibal gently petted Will's hair, letting the boy calm down.

"I'm here, Will. You're safe."

Hannibal was right, Will told himself. He was safe when the older man was near. He needed to show Hannibal he could be brave and believe him. He let go of Hannibal's shirt and looked up at the man. Asking with his eyes what to do next.

Hannibal smiled down at him, indeed proud, "It's time for the nurses to come take a look at you."

Will frowned. He didn't want anyone else. His head already hurt with all the new sights and sounds. He wanted to ask Hannibal if they could wait a while, but he couldn't figure out how to form the right words.

Hannibal sensed his discomfort and hushed him softly, “Will, darling, the nurses are trained professionals that only want to help you. I asked specifically for these nurses. Nurse Henderson worked at my hospital and she has three sons about your age. Nurse Abayomi, also worked for me, she is a wonderful gardener and has two little dogs,” Will perked up at the mention of dogs. Hannibal gently cupped his cheek, “I trust them and I think you should give them a chance.”

Will nodded immediately, anything the man wanted was first priority. Seeing his agreement, Hannibal waved at the door and two women dressed in scrubs entered.

“Will, this is nurse Henderson,” Hannibal gestured towards the older white woman with graying hair, “And this is nurse Abayomi,” Hannibal smiled at the tall black woman with puppies scattered across her blue scrubs.

Will eyed the nurses warily. They had kind faces. Will didn't think they would hurt him. They sort of reminded him of one of his school nurses. Whenever he got headaches or got on the teacher's nerves for fidgeting he got sent to the nurse. She'd always give him snacks and talk absolute nonsense he didn't understand. It was peaceful being oblivious. He decided to trust the new nurses. He smiled shyly. They smiled back.

“Hello, sweetie, it’s nice to meet you,” The older woman bubbled, “You don’t have to worry about us, we’ll get out of your hair real soon, so you can get back to resting.”

“It’s lovely to meet you, Will,” Nurse Abayomi greeted after.

Her bright white teeth dazzled Will. He liked her sunny disposition and the dogs on her scrubs. He pointed at them unconsciously, “Dogs.”

She looked down at her shirt, "You like them?"

Will nodded. She looked thoughtfully at him, then reached in her pocket. She produced a small paper in her hand which Will eyed suspiciously. "I have a dog sticker, if you'd like…?"

She held out the small sticker. Will looked at Hannibal for permission, the older man nodded. His shaky hand reached forward and took the sticker, quickly retreating away. Printed on the glossy paper was a cute little hound. It had droopy ears that fell past its paws. Will’s eyes widened. It was the cutest basset hound he had ever seen. He hadn't seen a different dog in so long he couldn't believe it. It had just been Winston and Buster for so long.

Suddenly, he remembered his box of treasures and his dogs. He had left them! How could he have left them?! The dragon would throw them away! Tears welled in his eyes and he curled in on himself as racks of sobs poured out of him. His dogs! He had lost his dogs!

"Will," The kind man was suddenly there, hugging him tightly, "It's alright, baby. It's alright."

"M–my dogs," Will managed to cry.

"I know, darling, your dogs. Your dogs."

Will had no idea how Hannibal knew about his dogs, but somehow, just knowing Hannibal had heard his mourning sobs was enough. Hannibal understood him.

He hiccuped, trying to calm down. He wiped his face with the back of his hand. Hannibal helped him clean up more with tissues. He stared down at the crinkled little basset hound in his hand still sniffling slightly, "Puppy," he said worshipfully to the image.

"Do you like it, sweetie?" Abayami asked, her voice sounded a bit anxious, probably from his outburst.

"Yes, ma'am," Will answered immediately, "Thank you so much ma'am. I'm sorry for cryin' ma'am."

Will tensed waiting for a harsh reply or possibly a smack, but none came. Hannibal's warm hand gently rested on his shoulder and Will felt instantly safer. He let out a content sigh as his body uncoiled from its moment of panic. The hand didn't leave, just continued rubbing soothing circles. Will was extremely grateful for the hand, he wanted to shout 'Thank you! Thank you!' but he couldn't bring himself to speak again.

“Now, Will," Nurse Henderson began, "We need to move to an examination room."

Will shrunk back against Hannibal's hand. They wanted to leave? Would Hannibal go too? Will was afraid the man would leave him, he turned his frightened eyes towards his rescuer, pleading silently to stay.

Hannibal immediately understood and pulled the boy into a hug, "It's alright, Will. I'll be with you the whole time. I'm not leaving."

"Oh the poor thing,” Henderson murmured, “Do you think he can manage to make it to the room?"

"We may need a chair," Hannibal agreed. Will hadn’t stood for longer than a few seconds since Hannibal had found him. He worried the boy’s muscles were atrophied.

Will mewled pitifully and did his best to pull himself up into Hannibal's arms, but the older man gently pushed him down, "I can't carry you Will. You can either walk or ride in a wheelchair."

“Are you leaving, sir?” Will asked worriedly. He didn’t understand why the older man couldn’t just carry him. *You’re a burden, that’s why. Hannibal is tired of you. You’re just trash that should be thrown away. He doesn’t want you. He probably hates you –*

Will’s spiraling thoughts were interrupted by Hannibal’s soft voice, “I will stay with you the whole time if you'd like. I can even hold your hand. Would you like that?”

Instant relief washed over Will as the intrusive thoughts were banished by the kind man; he nodded and grasped Hannibal’s hand.

"Then I'll stay right by your side,” He squeezed Will’s hand, “Nurse Abayomi and Nurse Henderson are going to come with us too.”

Henderson smiled at him, "Do you want to walk or have a chair?”

Will looked at Hannibal to decide. Hannibal indicated to him, “It’s up to you, Will.”

Will looked back and forth between the two, trying to gauge what they wanted. They didn’t seem to want him to be sickly or ill, so he should show them he was strong. "May I walk, please?"

"Of course, sweetheart,” Nurse Henderson agreed instantly.

"Thank you ma'am. Thank you, sir."

"Well aren't you just the politest teen I've ever met. Maybe you can teach my boys a thing or two," Henderson laughed cheerfully as she held open the hospital room door, "Now we are just going a bit down the hallway. Not a long walk at all,"

Will slid to the edge of the bed. Blood rushed to his head at the slight movement and he felt woozy. He looked at Hannibal, “Please carry me, sir? I'll be a good boy. I promise,” Will pleaded.

Hannibal shook his head apologetically, “Will, I've already contaminated evidence enough as it is. Once the test is over I will carry you back. Do you think you can wait that long?”

Will didn't want to wait. He wanted Hannibal's warm body pressed close to his. But his desires were never important. Someone else always dictated his ways. At least it was Hannibal. Hannibal seemed to give him easy directions and wasn't mad when he needed time.

“Ok” he whispered.

"Good boy, Will," Hannibal praised.

Hannibal helped stand unsteadily on his two feet. He leaned heavily on the man’s offered arm. The floor was unpleasantly cold and made him shiver.

“Here, Will, why don't you put these on?” Abayomi kneeled down by his feet with a pair of fuzzy slippers. She laid them carefully by his feet so he could slide his feet in. He stepped into them.

“They're so soft,” he found himself speaking his thoughts out loud without meaning to. He clamped his mouth shut, flinching away from the nurse. The dragon would have beat him for less, he wasn't supposed to speak foolishly.

But the nurse just smiled, "I'm glad you think so."

The group of them made their way out of the room. Will leaned heavily on Hannibal as he limped down the hall while the nurses trailed slowly after. At the first sign of people, Will turned and buried himself in Hannibal's chest. The man whispered sweet nothings in his ear while shuffling him out of range of people.

They entered a small room. It was quiet and empty. Will poked his head out, daring to look around. There was white paper on the ground and there was a cushioned table with a white sheet.

Hannibal led him over to the paper on the ground. "You stand here, darling. The nurses are going to run some tests and take some photos."

What tests? What photos? He wanted to ask. Hannibal seemed to read his mind, "We need to document your condition."

"Am I messed up, sir?" Will asked softly, already resigned to the answer..

"No, of course not. But you are hurt. We need to make sure we have evidence so when we catch Dolarhyde, we can lock him in prison for what he's done."

"Am I going to prison with him?" Will remembered the bloody nights where the red splattered across his face. If they knew what he did, they would surely lock him away. He was a dragon after all.

"No, darling. He hurt you. You are not going to prison," Hannibal assured him.

Hannibal didn't know. He would hate Will if he found out. Will tried to explain, "But I'm bad."

"No, you're not."

Will wanted to argue, but Hannibal was so firm over the fact that Will didn't push. Hannibal's tone turned gentle, "Will, listen to me. I need to ask you something."

Will looked up at the man.

"Did that man hurt you?"

Yes .

"Did he force you to do things you didn't want to do?"

Yes . Will didn't say a word but Hannibal knew.

"Did he rape you?"

Yes . Will couldn't say it but Hannibal knew.

"You see," Hannibal held his chin, guiding Will's gaze to his, "You've done nothing wrong. You are innocent. The tests would ensure Dolarhyde is punished for everything he's done. I know this is a difficult decision, but we'd like to give you a rape kit. It can be used as evidence in court. Would you agree to it?"

"What is it?" Will asked in a small voice.

“Well, Nurse Henderson would ask you some questions and take some samples from off your body. And nurse Abayomi would photograph you.”

Will glanced at the nurses who were hovering at a distance watching the scene. He was nervous to be alone with them, “You’ll stay?”

“Of course I will.”

“It hurts?”

“No. It may be uncomfortable,” Hannibal gave him a meaningful look, “but if you want to stop at any time, you can. It's all up to you.”

“I don't want to mess it up.”

“Nothing you do can mess it up. If you want to stop, that is perfectly fine.”

"OK…" Will answered hesitantly.

Nurse Henderson stepped forward, she held a clipboard. "Alright sweetheart, Nurse Abayomi, will be recording this session as well as taking photos. And Will, you are aware you can stop this examination at any time?”

"Y-yes , ma'am," he whispered.

“Wonderful, then let's start with some easy questions. What’s your name?”

Will looked at Hannibal. Hannibal smiled encouragingly. “W-Will. Will Graham.”

“Good, good. Alrighty. Can you tell me your address?”

Will stared at her blankly, “I-I don’t know.”

“That’s OK, sweetie. Do you know your age?”

“Nineteen?” Will looked questioningly at Hannibal who nodded. He told them his birthday. Will felt embarrassed, he couldn’t even remember his age. It hadn’t seemed to matter for so long.

“Are you in pain anywhere?” Nurse Henderson interrupted his thoughts.

“Y-yes.”

“Where does it hurt sweetheart?”

“My-my head.”

“Do you have a headache?”

A nod.

“Did your head get hit?”

Will shrugged. He’s been hit so many times. He couldn’t tell if the headache was from the bright lights of the hospital or from the dragon’s fists.

“Can you show me where it hurts most on your head?”

Will pointed to the back of his head where the blood pounded behind his ears. Henderson, with gloved hands, approached Will. She paused before raising her hands, “May I touch your head?”

Will shrunk from the nurse. He gripped Hannibal's hand tightly and pressed his back against the man's chest. Hannibal gently turned the boy towards him.

"Will, you need to let nurse Henderson check you. I will hold your hand the whole time."

Will didn't want to disappoint Hannibal. He nodded and tucked his face against the older man’s chest as Hannibal stroked the back of his hand with his thumb. Nurse Henderson carefully ran her hand through Will's hair feeling his scalp. Her hand hovered over a painful spot on Will's head. He flinched, the nurse immediately removed her hands.

“There’s a bit of a bump. You probably have a mild concussion. Would you like to sit down?

Will nodded immediately. Hannibal helped him climb up the padded table. He sat with his legs dangling. Hannibal stood close letting Will cling to his arm. He murmured encouragement into the boy's ear, "You are so brave, darling. You're doing great."

“We are going to start at the top of your body and go down,” The nurse informed him, “Your hair is very matted, we would like to take a sample. Can we cut a piece of your hair?”

Will agreed with a quick nod. He stayed stock still as the shears snipped away. The nurse clipped a few prices of his hair and placed them in a bag. Nurse Abayomi snapped several pictures of his hair.

“Now, you have a cut on your lip as well as a bruised cheek. Can you tell me what happened?"

"He hit me," It seemed stupid to say. Of course the dragon had hit him.

“Did he ever use your mouth sexually?” She asked with such expediency that Will knew she wished to expedite the topic quickly for his own benefit. He was grateful and nodded yes.

“Can you tell me what he did? Did he kiss you? Or have oral sex?”

"Both."

“Do you remember when was the last time he had oral sex with you?”

Will scrunched his face thinking. "Last night?"

“Did he ejaculate in your mouth or on you at all?”

Will shook his head thinking about how the man had stopped. The dragon had become so angry at what he saw on his computer. He hadn't finished with Will. "Not last night."

Nurse Henderson held a swab stick up so Will could see. “I'd like to take a saliva sample. I'd have you open your mouth and I'll swab the inside of your cheek. Is that okay with you?”

Will glanced at Hannibal. Hannibal squeezed his hand, "The swab will give us DNA evidence. Would you like to have a swab?"

Hannibal wanted him to be brave. He needed to try his best, so he agreed softly, “Ok.”

He opened his mouth obediently as the woman ran a foul tasting stick along the inside of his mouth. “Good job, Will,” She stashed the stick in a bag on the counter and turned back to the boy, “Now we need to look at your other injuries on your body. We are going to have you remove the top of your robe.”

Hannibal helped him untie the strings that held the gown in the back. He slipped the itchy hospital robe off his shoulders and torso. The sleeves fell down his arms and the fabric pooled over his lap, keeping him decent. The air was cool on his skin and he shivered.

“Oh my,” Nurse Henderson gasped as she saw his body. Nurse Abayomi raised her camera and clicked the button several times.

Will glanced up at Hannibal, “Did I mess it up?”

“No darling. You’re doing great,” Hannibal shot a withering look at the nurses who immediately dropped their stunned and horrified expressions. “Nurse Henderson, if you’ll continue? I’m sure Will would like to get back to bed.”

The nurse complied, looking guilty at her initial shock, “I apologize Will. You are being very brave right now.”

They quickly noted the bruises on his arms. The handprints encircling his neck. They prodded at his chest to ensure he didn’t have any broken ribs. Just bruised, they said. They moved to his blistered back.

“The patient has long semi healed lacerations over his back. The welts continue down his back to the patient's gluteal,” Nurse Henderson narrated, “Do you know when this happened, Will?”

Will couldn’t quite remember when Dolarhyde had whipped him last. He had been bad; he knew that for sure, that’s what the dragon always said, but he couldn’t remember what he’d done to deserve it. It made it hard to remember the last time, “I don’t remember. I’m sorry.”

“That’s fine, Will. Did you remember if he used a cord or a belt or something else?”

“A belt.” Will shivered thinking of the first time.

*

Will laid pinned beneath the dragon as the man caught his breath in his post-coital bliss. Will ignored the uncomfortable weight of the dragon and the sticky wetness dripping out of him and down his thighs. The side of his face was pressed against the sheets as he stared longingly at the bedroom door. Will couldn't think of anything except his half eaten oatmeal sitting in a bowl downstairs. It must be getting cold by now. But it would still be good. There had to be a good two or three spoonful's left. Will was so hungry.

Before meaning to, he spoke his thoughts, "I'm hungry."

A terrible silence reigned before the dragon's hot breath hissed in his ear, "What?"

Will instantly knew he should have kept his mouth shut. But his stomach spoke before his brain could catch up, "I'm hungry. I didn't finish my oatmeal- can I please have it?"

"You just ate, and you want more?" The dragon accused Will angrily as if he hadn't just yanked Will away from his meal just minutes earlier to fuck him.

"Please great dragon?" Will whined as his stomach growled.

"You fucking ungrateful shit," The dragon roared, pushing up from the boy. He shuffled for something on the floor. He muttered vehemently, "I'll teach you to be grateful."

Will watched as the dragon raised his belt from where it had fallen in his lustful hast. Will knew the look on the dragon's face and the way he held the belt– he had seen it on his father's face every time he had been beaten. It lacked mercy and was full of anger.

Will tried to cover his face as he pleaded with the man, "I'm sorry, I didn't mean it. I'm sorry–"

The dragon brought the belt snapping down on the boy's exposed back. Will screamed and tried to scramble away but he was pulled back by his foot as the dragon rained the leather across his skin. His back was on fire as the leather ripped at his skin. His meal was quickly forgotten.

*

"Will?" Hannibal's voice called to him. Will blinked. He was sitting on the examination table and Hannibal bent down on his level, studying his face, "You left us for a moment."

"I'm sorry, sir," he whispered, his eyes downcast.

"It's alright, darling. Where did you go?" Hannibal asked, stroking his hair.

"With him. He keeps the belt by the bed if I'm bad. I'm always bad."

"Will, you are not bad. That man was beating you and raping you. You are not in the wrong."

Will sighed. Hannibal just didn't understand. Will would give him time. Eventually everyone grew tired of Will's behaviors. Hannibal would beat him just like his father had and just like the Dragon had. Will deserved the punishments. It was the only way he learned. But for now he'd just agreed with Hannibal, "Yes, sir."

The answer made Hannibal frown slightly.

They did several more tests checking his hips and legs. They found a disturbing number of bruises and even some burns where Dolarhyde had put out his cigarettes on the boy's skin. They also asked about his feet when he jerked away from them when they touched them.

"Broken," was all he could utter before burying his face into Hannibal's chest. They moved on quickly.

"Now, Will we have one last test," Henderson explained, "We need to check your privates."

Will shuddered. They going to touch him there? Did they mean to rape him too? His grip on Hannibal's hand turned to iron and he turned pleadingly to Hannibal, begging with his eyes to help him. Hannibal pulled him close to his warm chest. The older man could feel Will's heart hammering against his skin, "Will, they are not going to hurt you. I wouldn't let them. Do you trust me to keep you safe?"

Will could feel the tears begin to pour down his face. Of course, he knew Hannibal could keep him safe. But that didn't mean he would. People were monsters. They only looked out for themselves and they took what they wanted regardless. Why would Hannibal be any different?

"You don't have to, Will. I'll take you back to the room right now, if that's what you'd like," Hannibal spoke softly as he enclosed the boy in his arms. Will pressed into the man's warmth, his own skin feeling cold and prickly

Will took a shaky breath. Hannibal had been nothing but understanding. Even now, when Will was panicking, Hannibal was giving him a way out. It seemed wrong to simply give up, when the older man had offered him everything.

"Will you stay?" Will whispered, more of a plea than a question.

"Always," The man promised.

They didn't say another word, but Will let himself be laid back on the examination table. The nurses moved silently and efficiently. Will's legs were spread. Will flinched whenever they touched him, but Hannibal stayed right by his side murmuring comforting words.

"His rectum is red and irritated. There are visible signs of past tearing," Henderson quietly informed Hannibal, "Looks like many brutal assaults."

The examination was quickly over and Hannibal was helping him sit up and retying the hospital robe. Will leaned against Hannibal's chest, utterly exhausted from the ordeal. He could feel his eyes begin to droop.

He tugged on Hannibal’s shirt to get the man’s attention. When Hannibal looked down, Will yawned sleepily, “Please carry me, sir?”

Hannibal couldn’t resist the boy's plea. He scooped Will up and carried him out of the examination room. There had been enough trials for the day. Will deserved rest.

Chapter 6

It had been hours.

Francis Dolarhyde had not shown his face. SWAT lay in wait, but no monster showed. Sitting on his hands, waiting, never suited Jack Crawford. He finally gave the order. Dozens of agents swarmed the house and began examining the evidence. Dogs were brought and a mass of shallow graves behind the barn was uncovered. They called in trucks and ambulances just to haul the bodies. It seemed every few minutes they were carting away another body. The smell and flies became thick.

Beverly sat in Dolarhyde's media center away from the horrors outside. The man had quite the collection of films and filming equipment. He left so much evidence, he obviously felt comfortable and safe in the house. It probably prompted his escalation to murdering families. It scared the agent how long it had taken them to find him. Beverly snorted to herself. Find? More like stumble by chance onto his property where the man didn't bother to hide his tracks.

She was currently sifting through the man's files on his computer. They hoped to find something in his history to indicate where he'd gone, but it was cleared. Now Beverly was looking through his finances, and for a serial killer, he paid his taxes. She groaned, this was leading nowhere fast. She exited out of the bank records and stared at his blank blue screen saver.

Who was so boring that they didn't have a background picture? He just had a bunch of random applications and files pinned to the screen. She scrolled through, hovering her mouse over each one so she could read the names. Suddenly a name caught her attention.

Will's first.

She sat forward, immediately opening the file. It was a video. Her fingers tapped on the laptop impatiently as the file loaded. It finally opened.

The video showed a man tied to a chair in the room Beverly now sat in. He had just been a few feet in front of her. The video had no sound that Beverly could hear and nothing on screen was happening. She skipped ahead. Her eyes widened and she stood abruptly.

She looked around until she found Crawford across the room. Their eyes met, "Sir, you need to see this."

***

Will woke to the sound of Hannibal speaking in a low voice. Will could see him speaking quietly into his phone across the room while Will lay curled on the bed. Will smiled slightly at the man who hadn't noticed he had woken. It was nice waking up this time. His head felt less foggy and he could actually recall what had happened last time he was awake. He remembered the nurses and how Hannibal had made him take some tests and then how he had held him.

He remembered nurse Henderson who called him sweetie and Nurse Abayomi who had dogs on her scrubs. She had given him a picture of a dog. She said it was a sticker. It had a basset hound on it.

Will sat up abruptly, blankets falling from his body as he looked about the bed. Where did the dog go? His search turned frantic as the little sticker didn't appear. He had a sick feeling that he dropped it during the examination. Will couldn't go back to that room. It was too much. He grabbed at his hair, pulling harshly as he felt a sob build in his chest.

"Will, what's wrong?" Hannibal was by him. His maroon eyes full of concern as he held his phone away from his face. Will realized he had interrupted the man while he was on the phone, he felt terrible for interrupting the man. He dropped this hands, hugging himself tightly and tucking his chin down. He was ashamed for disturbing Hannibal and for losing the dog. Why was he so stupid? He let out a choked sob.

"Mylimas, what's wrong?" Hannibal placed his phone down on the side table as he sat on the edge of the bed. He pulled Will into his arms.

Will sniffed, trying to pull himself together, "I'm sorry."

"What are you saying, Will? You have nothing to be sorry for," Hannibal stroked Will's hair.

"I lost the dog," Will whined. He couldn't hold back his tears anymore and cried on Hannibal's shoulder.

"No, baby, you didn't lose it. I have it right here," Hannibal drew the slim paper from his pocket and handed it to the boy.

Will gasped when he saw the picture, "It's not lost?"

"No, you were holding it so tightly I thought you might crush it. I didn't want you to get upset so I put it in my pocket for safe keeping."

Hannibal gently pushed the boy up from his shoulder so he could look at him. He tenderly wiped Will's tears away. "Besides, even if you had lost it or crumpled it, you still would have nothing to apologize for."

"But I might have ruined it." Will frowned. His little brow furrowed at the complexity of Hannibal's statement. Hannibal couldn't help but smile at how adorable the boy looked puzzled.

"Then I would have gotten you another one," Hannibal assured him.

"You don't mean that," Will said in awe.

"Yes, I do," Hannibal brushed the boy's hair from his face. His face was already looking better. The whiteness of his skin was receding. And while he was still deathly pale, Hannibal could see color in his cheeks. He couldn't resist gently massaging Will's scalp; the boy leaned into his hand, "Now, how are you feeling?"

Will's eyes flickered up, meeting his eyes only for a moment before falling down in deference, "I'm good, sir. Thank you."

"You can call me Hannibal."

"Thank you, Hannibal, sir," Will repeated quickly.

Hannibal sighed. The boy was obviously ruled by fear and for good reason. It would take time before he responded without fear of retribution. Until then, Hannibal would take his time and earn the boy's trust.

"Does your head hurt?" Hannibal briefly reached behind Will's head and felt for the bump. Its swelling had gone down significantly.

"No, sir. I mean, H-Hannibal. It's fine now," Will worried his lip with his teeth. His head in fact did feel much better.

"How would you feel about getting cleaned up? I have a friend bringing up some new clothes just for you. It'd be nice to be clean, wouldn't it?" Hannibal stood from the bed.

"Y-yes," Will answered, though all he could think about was the forced baths and showers the dragon had made him endure.

Hannibal helped him stand. Will started to mourn his fuzzy slippers when Hannibal produced them and placed them on the floor by Will's feet. Will slipped them on and mustered a quiet 'thank you sir'. He carefully put his paper dog on the bed, fearing it might get wet in the bath. Holding on to Hannibal's arm, Will limped to the attached bathroom, guided by the older man. Hannibal pulled a stool and Will gratefully sat down. The bathroom was cold and smelled like antiseptics. Hannibal pulled the white curtain away from the tub.

"Do you need assistance washing Will?"

"N-no," Will answered tentatively. He could rinse himself off just fine. He felt queasy about Hannibal being there. Images of the dragon pressing him against the shower wall or pinning him in the tub filled his head. What if Hannibal was just waiting until he was naked to attack?

"I am going to go meet my friend to get your clothes. There's towels and a clean robe for when you're finished." Hannibal gestured to the counter where the fluffy white towels and new hospital gowns laid folded neatly.

Will looked stunned. The man was leaving just like that? Will was relieved but also fearful. What if someone else came in while Hannibal was gone? What if the man left and never came back?

"Do you know how to turn everything on?" Hannibal asked, pointing to the facet controls.

Will glanced at them. They seemed simple enough. He nodded though his stomach twisted with fear. Hannibal smiled and knelt on the ground by Will and placed a comforting hand on the boy's knee. "Do you think you can wash on your own?"

“You’re coming back?” Will grabbed Hannibal's hand, clutching it like it would slip away from him forever.

Hannibal squeezed Will’s hand and caressed Will’s bruised cheek with his other, “I will. But I can stay if you’d wish me too.”

Will was so close to asking him to stay, but he didn’t want to disappoint the man. He was also scared, “Th-thank you Hannibal, b-but, I can do it.”

Hannibal’s eyes bored into Will, as if he could see the boy’s lies. Will’s breath hitched, but Hannibal just gave him a small sad smile, “You’re a very brave boy.”

Will felt a warm fuzzy feeling spread across his chest at Hannibal’s words. They made him feel braver than he knew he was. If Hannibal thought he was brave, he could be. He smiled hesitantly back.

Hannibal stood and gently pried his hand from Will’s grip. “I’ll be right back with your clothes.” Hannibal walked to the door. He stood in the entrance for a moment, “I'll be back, Will."

Hannibal left the room, sliding the door closed behind him. A part of him screamed not to leave Will under any circumstances, but that was not sustainable. Will needed his space and if he needed Hannibal, he would just have to trust that the boy would ask for him.

He went back to his phone and redialed Alana's number. She picked up immediately, "Is everything alright Hannibal?"

"Yes, I apologize for hanging up so suddenly earlier. Will had a minor panic attack when he woke."

"No worries, Hannibal. I have the clothes you asked for. Do you want me to run them up?"

"He is currently in the shower," the sound of water running began through the door. Good, he figured it out, Hannibal was afraid the boy would not know what to do. "Why don't I meet you at the main desk?"

"I can take them to the room if you'd like. It might be easier and you wouldn't have to leave him."

Hannibal was tempted to take her offer, but he didn't want Will to panic again by introducing a new face, at least not until Hannibal had properly warned him. Nothing about Will said flight risk. The young man could barely walk on his own. Hannibal doubted he would flee the hospital room, but he still wished he could keep an eye on him. He wouldn't be gone long, he told himself.

"Let's meet at the front desk. I don't want to scare him. Once he's dressed, I'll invite you up."

"Of course, Hannibal. I'll see you soon."

Hannibal left Will's room and walked down the hall. Alana was standing by the desk waiting and holding several shopping bags. She was wearing a fitted suit and her hair was neatly cascading down her shoulders. Hannibal recognized the look, she must have come from teaching. She was put together, the only sign of distress came from the slight smudge of her lip stick.

"Hannibal," she called out to him as soon as she spotted him. Her eyes widened slightly at the sight of him. Hannibal cringed internally. He knew his disposition was out of sorts. He probably looked tired and unraveled, a look he rarely carried.

"Are you alright?" Alana asked as he reached her. The bags were dropped on the floor and he was pulled into a hug. He hesitated only a moment before reciprocating the embrace.

"You look terrible, Hannibal," Alana stated, not sugar coating her words.

Her honesty made him laugh as he pulled away from her, "I'll admit, I've felt better."

She chuckled but immediately sobered, "How is he?"

"Traumatized. Scared. And yet surprisingly brave," Hannibal described fondly.

"He has to be. I can't believe he survived that psycho," Alana scowled her anger towards the tooth fairy apparent, "They haven't found Dolarhyde yet. Nothing at the house."

"Jack cleared the scene?" Hannibal asked somewhat surprised. Jack had seemed set on laying a trap. His impatience must have gotten to him.

"Yes, they started a couple hours ago. There's bodies," Alana informed, her lips tightening.

"The missing victims?"

"That's what Beverly thinks, forensics is working on their IDs. Jack hasn't contacted you? You'd think he'd be all over our survivor for information." Alana looked worried.

Hannibal wondered if the events moving Will out of the house might have caused the man to hold off on his interrogation of the boy. It was possible the man had a heart and would wait for the kid to recover somewhat. "He was nonverbal for a while at the house. I tried to persuade Jack to leave him be. Hopefully that buys Will quiet through the night."

"You're worried," Alana surmised.

"Yes," Hannibal agreed. It would be better to draw Alana in on his side before Crawford steamrolled the case, "Will is fragile at the moment. He needs allies– friends to help him, not interrogators. You could be indispensable to him."

Alana gave him a funny look but promised, "We'll do everything we can for him."

He thanked her and took the bags, "Did you get the stuffed animal?"

Alana smiled, "Yes, it's in that one," she pointed to one of the larger bags, "When you said he loved dogs, I may have spent the majority of my time shopping looking through the stuffed animals."

Hannibal chuckled, "I know he'll love it. Thank you Alana. I'll call you down when he's ready."

He quickly walked back to the room already feeling like he had left the boy for far too long. When he got back he could still hear the shower running. He placed the bags on the table and unpacked the clothing. Alana had bought Will the basics, soft cotton shirts, a couple sweatpants, underwear, as well as a jacket. In a large bag atop some clothes was a stuffed yellow dog with a blue ribbon around its neck. Hannibal smiled at it hoping it would please the young man. He went to knock on the bathroom door.

"Will? It's Hannibal, I'm back. I'll wait out here until you're ready." There was no response, so Hannibal went and sat on one of the uncomfortable hospital chairs.

Five minutes passed and then fifteen. Hannibal was growing worried. He knocked on the door once more, "Will? Are you OK?" There was no reply, but the water still thundered on, "Will, I'm going to come in. If you don't want that say something now." The silence suffocated Hannibal's heart with worry. He opened the door.

Will was standing in the shower with his arms wrapped around himself.

"Will?" Hannibal called for his attention but the boy made no sign of hearing him. Hannibal approached the shower only to see that Will was bleeding from his arms where his nails were cruelly stabbed at his skin. He was trembling as he stood under the showers spray. The water flowed down his slim body carrying his blood into the pinkened water.

Hannibal shut off the water, noting how it was ice cold, and pulled Will's hands from his arms. Will shuddered at his touch and stubbled back as if waking from a dream. He let out a yelp of fear when he realized there were hands gripping his wrists.

Hannibal held him steady, not letting him fall backwards or lash out. Will's eyes were wide and his gaze seemed to bounce around the room as if he wasn't quite sure of his surroundings.

"Will, you're safe. It's me, Hannibal. You're safe. You're in the bathroom at the hospital."

After a moment, Will stopped struggling against Hannibal's grip. His darting eyes settled and he looked up at Hannibal, water dripping from his soaked locks down his brow, but not quite meeting Hannibal's eyes. He took a stunted breath, "H-Hannibal?"

"Yes, it's me, Will. Do you know where you are?" He loosened his grip on the boy's wrists and ran a soothing hand across the boy’s forearms.

Will made a whimpering sound and darted into the safety of Hannibal’s chest. Hannibal wrapped his arms about the quaking body ignoring how the freezing water soaked his shirt. He was concerned when he felt a warmer, sticky liquid on his shirt. The scent of fresh blood

assaulted his faculties. He was used to the smell of blood, he may even go so far to say he enjoyed it, but coming from the fragile pale boy– he hated it.

He pulled Will from the confines of the shower tub. Will went without hesitation burrowing himself under Hannibal's chin. Hannibal could feel the boy pressing against him down the whole line of his body. He was shaking and trembling from the cold and his fright. He maneuvered Will into sitting on the toilet as he reached over and grabbed the towels from the sink, all the while letting Will press his face into him.

"Shh, baby, you're safe. Let's get you warmed up," Hannibal wrapped a towel towel around the boy's shoulders, another over his lap. He took the last towel and began drying Will's hair that was dripping icy water down his face and back.

He massaged the towel through Will's hair noting that though Will was thoroughly drenched, his hair was still matted and his body still smelled of sweat and sex. The boy had stilled under Hannibal's hand, breathing in the older man's comforting scent. Hannibal knelt by the toilet and touched Will's face. The boy nervously looked up.

"Will, are you back with us?" Hannibal had a feeling the boy had been lost in some memory.

"Y-yes. I'm at the hospital, aren't I?" Will asked, his voice whispery.

"Yes, you are. And you remember who we are?" Hannibal gestured between both their chests.

"You're Hannibal," Will smiled at the man, he then dropped his gaze with a small frown, "And I'm Will."

Hannibal raised an eyebrow at Will's self deprecation. He did not like Will's tone as he said his own name, as if he hated it. Hannibal gently corrected him, "You're brave Will. You are doing well, mylimasis. Can you tell me what happened?"

Will put his head in his hands, "I don't know. You left and I got in the water, but-but I can't remember."

Hannibal hushed him "That's fine, Will. You don't have to remember, but you're not clean. You didn't wash."

Will's eyes filled with tears, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry– I didn't mean to. I must have gotten distracted. I'm sorry. I'll do better. Please don't hurt me! I'm really sorry."

Will's hands migrated from his face to his arms. His fingers itching to claw his arms. Hannibal took Will's hands in his own, preventing the young man from hurting himself more. He silenced Will's ramblings with an authoritative voice, "Will, you did nothing wrong. And you are not being punished. I just want to make sure you're OK."

"I'm sorry," Will whimpered.

"You're fine, Will. I don't want you to get hurt. I do not want you to scratch your arms. You're hurting yourself, and that is not good."

Will seemed to realize his arms had blood on them. He hiccuped an apology, "'m sorry, Hannibal."

Hannibal cursed himself internally for leaving the boy. He never should have left. Had he stayed, Will would be healthy and clean. The current state of the boy's arms was his fault. He sighed, "Let's get you in a bath and clean those scratches."

Hannibal quickly began filling the tub with warm steamy water. As the water rose, Hannibal went back to the boy who stared vacantly at the floor. With a clean washcloth, he wiped the boy's arms clean of the bloody mess. "Come now, let's get you clean and then I'll bandage those."

Hannibal helped Will to his feet and into the tub. Will stood dumbfounded, staring at the water around his feet.

"It's hot," Will stated abruptly.

Hannibal checked the water, fearing the water was scolding, but the temperature was a nice even warmth. "It's warm, Will, but not too hot," Hannibal assured him.

Will scowled, his fists clenching into little balls of frustration, "I'm not supposed to get hot water."

"Why is that?"

"I've been bad," Will venomantly answered, his self loathing obvious.

"Who told you that?" Hannibal asked, a spark of anger in his voice against Will's abuser.

Will caught his tone and deflated immediately, his fists dropping and his shoulders sagging timidly. He easily cowed and answered softly, "Everyone, sir."

"Everyone? Does that include me?" Hannibal asked.

Will's eyes grew huge and his mouth gapped for a moment, "N-no? I–I don't know?"

"I don't think you've been bad. You deserve a warm bath."

Will looked confused but he didn't argue with Hannibal. The older man helped the younger sit in the warm water and kneeled on the outside of the tub. He took a washcloth and poured some body wash into it. It quickly lathered and the smell filled the room. For a hospital soap it didn't smell half bad, which Hannibal was grateful for. He was sure he would get a headache if it was too strong. He dipped the cloth into the water and began to rub the fabric across the boy's chest and arms. Will sat still as a statue as Hannibal cleaned him. The older man diligently washed him with clinical accuracy. Quickly wiping down the boy's lower half before he could dwell on it. The task was finished quickly and Hannibal hung the cloth over the edge of the tub.

"I'll wash your hair now," Hannibal informed the shell shocked boy. Will just nodded mutely as Hannibal filled the palm of his hand with shampoo. He began by running his finger

through the boy's dirty hair, spreading the soap. Will let out a content sigh as Hannibal gently massaged the boy's head.

Will leaned into the touch.

Considering this was how the dragon sometimes initiated his advances, Will felt proud of himself for staying so calm and still. He glanced covertly at the man now washing him, his eyes barely flickering to the side. Hannibal was taller than him and more muscular. His strength barely contained beneath his white button up. If he wanted to, he could push Will under the water and hold him there until the water filled his lungs. Will probably wouldn't even struggle.

Will could imagine the same hands now lathering soap in his curls, pushing him against the tub. A heavy weight would cover him. Hands would scour his body pushing inside. He'd be pulled apart and consumed – But at least it wouldn't be the dragon. Hannibal would be gentle as he ripped Will apart.

Hannibal tapped him on the shoulder, bringing Will from his thoughts. "Lean back, we must rinse your hair," Hannibal whispered, his accent casting a hypnotic spell over Will.

Will slid down the tub, allowing his hair to spiral out around his head. Hannibal was now directly above him, leaning over the edge of the tub. Will couldn't help but spy on Hannibal. His expression read of worry and concern. His hands bracketed Will's face as he rinsed the soap from the boy. His fingers dragging through the curls without pulling on a single hair. Will wondered if this was how Hannibal would take him– no pain but with total control.

Hannibal finished his hair and gestured for Will to sit up. He began draining the tub while toweling the boy dry. Will shivered as the warm water slipped away.

"We shall get you warm soon, but I need to bandage your arms," Hannibal immediately set to work. He applied some antibacterial medicine before bandaging the wound. Carefully wrapping gauze around Will's arms. And then helped the boy stand, toweling him off. He left a towel draped over the boy's shoulders and wrapped another around the boy's waist.

"Can you walk?"

Will made no response except to press his face against Hannibal's chest. His fists gripping the front of Hannibal's shirt. Hannibal took that as no, and scooped the boy up into his arms and carried him bridal style out of the bathroom. He placed him on the bed, but as he pulled away, Will clung desperately to him.

Will's thoughts were spiraling again. Would Hannibal leave again? The terrible sick feeling invaded his stomach once more. He couldn't let Hannibal leave him, so he tried to beg the man to stay, how he begged the dragon. He nuzzled his face into Hannibal's neck as he attempted to pull the larger man down on him. He peppered Hannibal's neck and collar with frantic kisses. "Please don't leave. I can be good. I can show you," Will practically ripped the towels away from his body and spread his legs, "See? I'm a good little dragon. I won't fight, please don't leave again."

Hannibal caught himself before he fell atop the now naked squirming boy. Will was flushed and greedily mouthing at his neck, his hands tugging at his shirt. Hannibal could feel the young man's heart pulsing rapidly as he tried to seduce the elder's company. Hannibal despised rudeness, and the ultimate disrespect was taking advantage of those with no means. How this dragon must have used him, if the boy's only means of persuasion was through offering his body.

He drew back, freeing himself from Will's grasp, "Will, I'm not leaving."

Will sat up and grabbed Hannibal's hand, "Please, I can be good for you."

"No, Will. Not like that. We are going to get you dressed. Why don't you hold your dog?" Hannibal gestured to the sticker resting forgotten on the bed.

Will eyed Hannibal wearily, but released his hand and took the paper. If Hannibal wasn't going to fuck him, what would he do now? Will chewed on his lip nervously.

Hannibal grabbed the shopping bags. Digging through the contents he found the package of briefs. He tore the plastic open and pulled a pair out. He gestured for Will to slide his legs off the bed. Will moved easily and let the older man loop the underwear over his feet and up his legs until they rested comfortably over his hips.

Will made a happy sigh at the feeling of the fabric. It was so clean and utterly soft, completely different from his ragged old ones he'd been wearing. His hands immediately explored the fabric, running his hands over the delicate cotton.

Hannibal's heart quickened at the almost indecent way the boy touched himself. It was done with absolute innocence, but looked quite obscene as Will practically petted himself through the fabric, making soft sighs at the touches. Hannibal quickly pulled a shirt from the bag, determined to give Will's hands something else soft to feel.

Will's eyes widened in disbelief as he saw the shirt, "Is that for me too?"

"Yes, darling, there are trousers too," Hannibal answered kindly.

Tears filled Will's eyes. They weren't drawn from pain or sadness but absolute happiness at being gifted clothes. It had been so long since he had anything of his own to wear. The dragon had kept him practically naked, hating anything that hid Will from him. "Th-thank you Hannibal," Will choked out as the tears escaped down his face.

Hannibal gave him a small sad smile before wiping his tears away with a brush of his thumb, "Anything, Will. We'll get you a closet full of your own clothes. "

"Really?" Will bit his lip with nervous anticipation making them a bright red.

"Yes, you'll have to tell us what you like so we can get you more. Now arms up, please."

Will raised his arms and the older man slipped on the T-shirt. Though Alana had bought a small size the shirt seemed to dwarf the boy. The neck hole seemed to fall far too low on his chest and the gapping sleeves around the skeletal arms just accentuated the boy's starved

form. But the smile on the boy's face made the ill fitting shirt perfect. Will's fingers danced across the fabric taking in the soft material. His face lit up with happiness at each touch.

While the boy explored the shirt, Hannibal went to give him sweat pants, but found the stuffed animal on top of the pants. He had forgotten about the fluffy dog, and was excited to see how Will liked it.

"Will, I told my friend Alana that you like dogs. She bought your clothes and this," he held out the plush puppy. Will gapped at the precious dog and unconsciously reached for it. Hannibal placed it in his outstretched hands. The boy immediately cuddled the animal, squeezing it tightly to his chest. Kisses were littered profusely over its yellow fur and if Will was happy with the clothes before, his face showed pure delight. His happiness was contagious and Hannibal found himself chuckling at the boy, "Do you like it?"

Will launched himself at the older man, hugging him round the neck and kissing his cheek while urgently thanking the elder, "Oh, thank you Hannibal. It's perfect, thank you! I'll be so good, thank you Hannibal!"

Hannibal laughed at the boy's persistence and gently pried the boy once more off of him as the boy attempted to thank him the only way he knew– with his body.

Will was maneuvered back on the bed where he clung to the stuffy. Will was perplexed why Hannibal didn't try to kiss him back. That's what the dragon always did. He always had control of everything. Sex, kisses, kills. They were all the dragon’s.

Will buried his face in the plushie. Hannibal was so confusing to him. Why didn't Hannibal try to hurt him or fuck him? The older man was obviously powerful and Will could see a darkness lurking behind his facade, but he was also wonderfully kind. Will glanced shyly up at the tall man who was patiently waiting for Will to unfurl himself. The man's hair was messy and his shirt was damp with the water from the tub. If it was the dragon, he’d have snarled at Will for the mess, undoubtedly punishing him for it. But Hannibal just held the sweatpants as he cautiously waited for Will to be ready.

Will slowly uncurled and allowed Hannibal to slide the sweatpants over his skinny legs and up over his hips. He couldn’t contain a happy moan from escaping at the feeling of the soft clothes. He felt cocooned and warm and safe. When Hannibal patted the pillow, Will immediately snuggled down on the bed; his body turned so he could see Hannibal clearly. The older man pulled the blankets over him and tucked him in before slumping in the bedside chair.

Will watched him over his puppy’s head now cradled by his chest. Hannibal made no move to leave, instead seemed to stare off blankly while thinking. Will grinned to himself, he did the same thing– losing himself in his thoughts. It amused him that Hannibal had a similar characteristic as himself. Usually when he drifted off his father would snap at him or the dragon would slap him. Will didn’t want that to happen to Hannibal, so he decided to keep watch. He would wake Hannibal from his thoughts before the dragon could hurt him.

Chapter 7

Hannibal was indeed lost in his thoughts. After washing, bandaging, and clothing the young man, Hannibal felt uncomfortable emotions eating at him. They told him to care for Will and urged him to protect the young man at all cost. He hadn't felt this way for anyone in a little long time. It was unsettling. He never connected to people easily, most were pigs after all. But Will seemed different.

Most people amused him for a while. Brief elapses of pleasure to focus and hone his skills; for Hannibal enjoyed cultivating his amusements with his art. He grew strange and exotic plants, harvested flesh eating snails, and manipulated people to fit his own desires. He considered his relationships with those of his high society: they flocked to him for his charms and his table, and he in turn, gained access to hundreds of aesthetic and historic experiences. With his colleagues at the hospital, he ensured they all feared and respected him as a surgeon. And they unknowingly gave him the accreditation to move through his careers quickly. To Hannibal, most people were one manipulation away from getting what he wanted.

So, did he want to manipulate Will?

It would be amusing, yes. But, Hannibal was more curious about the boy than anything. He saw no fame or wealth or status to be gained in Will, other than to tantalize his curiosity. Will had survived the presence of a killer. While all others had been killed, Will lived on. Though he was battered and broken– shattered glass– he could be mended. Hannibal could already see his jagged edges, gold as they turned molten and merged. Will would form into a new creation. He would not be as he was before, Hannibal knew it and he wished to see his metamorphosis.

Hannibal looked to Will. He was met by two soft blue eyes watching him from the bed. Will was warm beneath the covers staring up at him. His dark curls framed his face like a dark halo for his angelic features. His lips tipped upward and he made a contented sigh. Hannibal couldn’t help but smile back, “Are you tired, Will?”

Will shook his head, still studying Hannibal as if he were a novelty. Hannibal noted how the few hours of, albeit stress induced, sleep had improved the boy’s disposition.

He checked the time, it had been hours, the boy must be hungry. Though the IV had given him medicine, it did nothing for the stomach. Hannibal asked quickly, “Are you hungry?”

Will’s eyes widened a fraction, a flash of fear inside them. He lowered his gaze and mumbled a noncommittal, “No, I’m fine. Thank you, sir.”

“I’m sure you could use some food, even if you aren’t hungry. We’ll get you a meal.”

Will said nothing, but his tongue involuntarily licked his lips with growing excitement. His hands fidgeted with the stuffed animal’s ears. Hannibal knew he was hungry. The older man decided to have Alana bring them all meals. He pulled out his phone and texted Alana his request then addressed the boy, “Will, I’d like you to meet my friend Alana."

“Here?” Will asked slightly wary.

Hannibal nodded.

Will thought for a moment, then asked, “She brought the clothes?”

“Yes, I asked her to.”

“I don’t think I can pay her.” Will whispered as if the thought had just accrued to him.

“You don’t need to,” Hannibal assured him, “Don’t worry about money, Will.”

Will frowned, “I oughta thank her though.”

“Of course you can thank her. You will do so when she gets here.” Hannibal may be curious enough about the boy, but he wouldn’t let him transform into a rude mongrel– at least not while Hannibal could help it.

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Will felt stupid and cowardly. At the first sound of the door opening he ducked beneath the covers. Hannibal had given him ample warning of Alana coming, but he was still frightened. A new person always meant death for so long. Will felt he cursed whomever he set eyes on.

A woman’s voice spoke, "Hi, Will. It's good to meet you."

He supposed it would be rude to stay hidden the whole time. Will peered above the stuffed animal's head. The woman was quite pretty with soft brown eyes and long dark hair. He decided to sit up and greet the woman proper, but kept his dog securely plastered to his front like a fluffy shield.

"Hello, ma'am,” Will whispered, barely audible. He hugged the yellow dog tighter.

Alana gave him a brilliant smile, "You can call me Alana. Ma’am makes me feel like an old lady,” Alana joked. Her locks bounced as she tossed her head back with a small laugh.

“Thank you for the clothes.” Will stated before he could forget.

“You're welcome, and you like them alright?"

"I love them, they're so soft."

“I’m glad, and you like this little guy?” Alana gestured to the stuffed animal being nearly squeezed to death against Will’s chest.

Will nodded immediately and smiled shyly, “Thank you for getting him! I named him Blue, if that’s okay.”

“Blue?" Alana asked, she looked amused.

Will nodded, "He has a blue ribbon."

"That's a good name, Will," Hannibal praised, making Will blush. He had opened several bags Alana must have carried in and was pulling out styrofoam containers. The smell of food hit Will and he felt his mouth water. He stared at Hannibal with a slack jaw. His stomach growled loudly.

Hannibal raised an eyebrow and glanced at Will as if to say, 'I told you so'. Will ducked his head in embarrassment. He wondered if Hannibal would give him food now, knowing how desperately his body hungered for it. The dragon wouldn't. He liked starving Will, seeing how Will shrunk and crumbled under his thumb.

"Will, would you like some chicken broth?" Hannibal broke Will's thoughts, holding out a plastic container.

Will's eyes darted between the container and Hannibal. All his senses were on high alert. Would Hannibal give him the bowl then snatch it away? Would he throw the hot broth across his face? Would the older man eat the food in front of him, tempting him with every bite? What kind of cruelty did Hannibal have in store?

Instead Hannibal simply put the bowl on the side table with a plastic spoon, "You may eat, Will."

Will did as he was told. He dropped Blue in his lap, the dog forgotten as the smell of food presented itself. He grabbed the bowl, ignoring the spoon, and greedily gulped the warm broth down. It was deliciously savory and perfectly seasoned. Will moaned at the taste.

"Slow down there," Alana seemed to order.

An unhappy whine came from Will's throat as he frowned and shuffled up the bed away from her. Still clutching the bowl to his lips. Would Alana take his food? He was only half way through the bowl. He wanted it all, he didn't want her to steal it from him. He tipped the bowl further up, trying to finish the meal as fast as possible. Streams of broth ran down the sides of his face as he tried to rush. It was hot and hurt his skin.

A hand suddenly appeared and pulled the bowl away from his mouth.

"No!" He sputtered and choked through the remaining broth in his mouth. His hands flailed as he tried to grab the bowl back but it was gone. In its place was a towel wiping his messy face and neck. He jerked away from it, "No!" He cried with more confidence, "I want it! Please! Give it back!"

"Will," Hannibal hushed him as he wiped his face clean, "You're spilling it all over yourself. You'll choke on it."

Hannibal had moved next to Will on the bed holding the towel. Will glared at the man, he didn't know what possessed him but he balled his fists and hit Hannibal. He didn't stop, he pummeled the man's chest, "I want it! I want it! I want the food!"

Will expected his arms to be quickly twisted, perhaps his body slammed against the wall, then beaten for his behavior, but Hannibal did nothing to stop his tirade except to lean back

slightly, so Will's fist's avoided his face. Eventually Will's fists grew heavy and his cries turned to sobs. He collapsed on Hannibal, burying his face into the man's button up. He hoped Hannibal would forgive his tantrum, but prepared himself to be punished.

So, when a kind hand began stroking his back he tensed. He relaxed after a moment letting Hannibal calm him. Hannibal pulled him closer and murmured words in a language Will didn't understand. They were softly spoken in his rich accent and Will felt like each syllable was meant for him.

Of course Hannibal wouldn't punish him. He was kind. Will felt hot tears of regret spilling from his eyes. He choked out an apology, "I'm sorry sir! I'm sorry Hannibal! I didn't mean to– I'm sorry!"

"Shh, darling, you're fine and I'm fine as well," Hannibal assured him, still holding him tight.

Will didn't quite believe his words. So, he sat up to look at the man's face. Hannibal's arms released their hold but still stroked up and down his bandaged arms. Hannibal's face showed no signs of enmity towards him. In fact, if Will read him correctly, Hannibal looked fondly concerned with him.

"You're not angry?" Will sniffed, wiping his eyes.

"No, darling. I shouldn't have taken your food without asking. I'm sorry." Hannibal looked forlorn, an expression Will did not like on the man.

Will tried to rectify it with a pout, "I hit you, you should be angry. You should beat me. I'm bad."

"You're not bad. You're just hungry," Hannibal said pointedly. The older man glanced over to Alana who was watching their interaction with interest, "Alana, could you pass us one of the rolls. I'm sure Will would appreciate some solid food."

Alana nodded and took a large dinner roll from one of the bags and handed it to Hannibal. Will eyed it eagerly, but he made no move to take it afraid he might hit the man again trying to get it.

Hannibal held the roll (though it was nearly the size of a loaf) out to the boy, "I won't take this from you, but please eat it slowly."

Hannibal almost sounded like he was pleading, which startled the boy so much that he took the bread with such solemnity his hands shook. Will wanted to tear the bread savagely apart, ripping the roll with his teeth. But Hannibal's plea made him go slowly.

He bit into the bread: it was light and fluffy and Will was sure he could eat these rolls forever if he had the option. He couldn't hold back the happily little moans of enjoyment as he ate. Hannibal sat next to him the whole time. And Will found himself leaning against the man's side as he ate, the older man's comforting arm wrapped around him. Once he had finished the roll, Hannibal had him drink water then let him finish the broth– with a spoon this time.

Hannibal and Alana made light conversation as Will ate. Will couldn’t focus on what they said his entire focus was on eating as much as possible as slowly as he was able. As his stomach became full, Hannibal stopped passing food to him instead insisting he drink more water. Will pouted and whined, but Hannibal wouldn’t budge, saying he’d “get sick” if he ate too much. Will huffed and hugged Blue tightly.

Alana seemed to notice he needed a distraction from food so she asked him, “Will, we were wondering if you had any family or friends that you'd like us to call?”

Will shook his head. His dad had been the only family he knew. For a moment he considered telling them about his friends from school in Louisiana, the ones that had invited him to the party, but thought better of it. He had left without telling anyone. They probably hated him. Or they honestly didn't remember him. They didn’t need to remember, Will remembered his sophomore year fondly for all of them. They were all probably in college. They probably had people chasing after them with proposals, job offers, and cool opportunities. And once again, Will was stuck behind. The only person that ever chased after him was the dragon. Will wished he had run faster.

"Will?" Hannibal interrupted Will's thoughts.

Will flinched. Hannibal and Alana were looking at him with worry in their eyes. He ducked his head embarrassed. "Sorry," he mumbled, "I had some friends in Louisiana, but-but it's been too long. They don't know me."

Hannibal and Alana both exchanged sober glances. Alana leaned closer from where she sat. Her hands moved as if she wanted to reach out and touch Will, but stopped herself. Will felt a tendril of self loathing wrap around his heart. Alana didn't even want to touch him. He was too dirty. Too broken for her hands.

"I'm sure they would appreciate hearing your ok." Alana said kindly.

Will scrunched his nose. He didn't know if ok was the right word. Alive maybe. He was alive. That was all that could be said about him.

"Is there anyone else you can think of? A distant aunt or cousin?" Alana asked, her voice almost sounding like a plea. She casted a worried look at Hannibal who looked equally concerned in his stoic way.

Why do they care so much about finding someone? Then it hit him.

He had nothing. He was nineteen, an adult with absolutely nothing except a stuffed dog and a pair of pajamas. There was no government net to fall into. No foster system, no programs. When he left the hospital, he'd leave with nothing but the clothes on his back and a hospital bill longer than his arm. He'd be on the streets alone. Was it cold out? Would he die from the elements? Would he starve in some back alley? Would someone kidnap him away to use at their own pleasure? He shuttered. He couldn't be a child anymore. He had to look out for himself. The prospect of protecting himself and caring for himself was so foreign, he didn't know where to begin.

A warm hand, Hannibal's hand, covered his own that were clutching Blue and shaking. "It's alright Will. We will figure it out."

Will wanted to yell that nothing was alright, but the man spoke with such confidence and sincerity that Will could almost believe him. "Where am I going to go?" Will felt tears in his eyes and tried to blink them away. Why did he have to cry all the time?

"We'll find you a place, Will. Don't worry," Hannibal squeezed his hands once more. Will looked down at their entangled hands, Hannibal's large warm hands covered his pale fingers. They didn't shake like his did. They were steady.

Alana's phone began to ring, startling the boy for a moment. Alana answered and her frown deepened. She glanced at Hannibal before standing and moving away.

Hannibal patted Will's hand before standing and following Alana.

"It's Jack," She said in a murmur, "He's here."

Chapter 8

Beverly's skin was white, her face flush, and her pulse rapid. She stood outside the house holding a flash drive full of evidence in one hand. She'd shown Jack the first kill, but quickly discovered the others. Twenty-two to be exact, each matching missing persons files she had studied for months– each one killed by the boy.

Beverly shivered and looked down at the photograph in her other hand. A simple Polaroid. There was the man, Francis Dolarhyde standing menacingly behind the boy. An arm wrapped possessively around the child's bare waist. Beverly was sick to her stomach at the sight, but the most appalling part of the photo was the boy's smile. He grinned at the camera, manic, freakish– like a wolf on a leash.

She slipped the photo she had found in the evidence file and pulled out her phone. She dialed Alana's number.

"Dr. Bloom, it's Bev, we've found some evidence at the–"

"What evidence?" Alana's voice interrupted, diving straight to the point.

"Snuff films. But- but it's not Dolarhyde. Well not *all* his. It's the kid... He killed the missing victims."

"...Oh." Alana sounded defeated.

"Crawford's coming to you. He left about 20 minutes ago."

"Fuck… Ok, we'll be here. Did he say what he's going to do?" Alana sounded stressed as she prepared for the worst.

"He wants to see him. Not sure if it's to interview him or read him his rights. He's probably pissed enough to slap handcuffs on the kid." Beverly pictured the director as he watched the video. His features had tightened as he watched the boy gore bodies with bloody ferocity.

"Shit, okay. We'll deal with it, thanks for the warning."

"He's gonna confront him."

"Will doesn't need that."

Beverly thought differently. The kid most definitely needed to be confronted with what he'd done. "It's our job to catch the killer. The kid could be the answer."

Alana sighed, "I know, but I wish there were an easier way for the victims."

Beverly said nothing. All she could see in her head was Will's knife stabbing the man over and over and over.

She swallowed hard, “Well hopefully it gets figured out."

"Thanks Bev." Alana said before her goodbyes. Beverly hung up. She headed towards the cars. Back to the labs to dig through the copious amount of evidence. The creepy polaroid burned in the file.

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"He's just calmed down, we can't introduce Crawford. He'll terrify him all over," Hannibal argued.

Alana nodded with an unhappy sigh. He knew she was fully supportive of him but that didn't stop him from complaining about the obvious to her. He needed someone to recognize the injustice being done to Will.

Hannibal glanced at the boy now curled up under the covers, happy to be ignored as the two discussed his fate in low voices from across the room. He couldn't let Crawford take the boy after years of fear and torment.

"He'll need to talk to him eventually. He's a key witness." Alana reasoned.

"If he's just seen a kill video, he'll be angry and looking for a punching bag. Will is not that punching bag."

"Yes, I agree, so we need to be the *calm ones* ," Alana gave him a pointed look.

She was right of course. He needed to be calm and poised. He took a breath, releasing the tension in his shoulders. "You're right."

"Of course I'm right." She gave him a quick smirk before turning serious, “What are you going to do?”

Hannibal looked at the huddled form under the blankets. He couldn’t take his eyes off Will for long, wanting to ensure he was safe and comfortable. He sighed, “I told you he needs allies, not enemies. I plan on being his ally despite his unfortunate actions under duress. And I will not let the FBI throw him to the wolves.”

Alana nodded, “I agree. The FBI can’t allow Will to take the fall for the Tooth Fairy’s actions. He needs time to heal before any type of consequence is even discussed.”

"Where is he!" a harsh new voice yelled. The hospital room’s door flew open as Jack Crawford barged in. He looked haggard and his glare like daggers.

Will sat up from his rest, startled. When he saw Crawford, he cried out in fear and scrambled backwards, twisting himself in the sheets as he tried to flee from the large man. He only managed to tangle himself worse as he toppled backwards over the edge of the bed.

“Get out Jack!” Hannibal roared as he intercepted Jack’s descent on the boy.

“Will!” Alana ran to Will.

“He doesn’t leave this room!” Jack yelled, pointing an accusing finger towards the now hidden boy who seemed to have crawled beneath the hospital bed.

Hannibal stepped in front of the man, blocking him from Will. He was tempted to punch the yelling agent, but contented himself by swatting Jack’s hand away, “What do you want, Jack?”

"He killed them– all of the missing persons." Jack’s eyes were wild, the man was out for blood.

"He admitted to having killed when we were at the house!" Hannibal reminded him.

"He said he killed, not that he butchered twenty-two people!"

"Jack, get out of here." Hannibal seethed, “You’re not being sensible.”

"Sensible? Sensible is making goddamn sure he doesn't escape!"

"He won't escape. We’re watching him” Hannibal repeated hoping to hurry the man out.

“He's groomed to kill, and he's exceptionally good at it," Jack spit.

"He was kidnapped and tortured–"

“You didn’t see what I saw!” Jack yelled silencing Hannibal, “He’s dangerous. I’m placing a security detail around him. I want him under constant supervision.”

"Hannibal!" Alana cried in alarm. Hannibal spun around. Her eyes darted to where Will was hidden then back to Hannibal. She gestured frantically for him to come over.

Jack ignored her, "I need his interview immediately!"

"You'll get it when he's calmed down," Alana snapped at the director. Hannibal rounded the bed to where Alana was crouched. He shot her a look that read *'get him out of here'* before switching her spots; crouching where Will had disappeared under the bed.

Hannibal tried to ignore Alana and Jack, as the petite doctor practically pushed Jack from the room, slamming the door closed behind them.

He focused on the two pale feet visible from under the bed.

"Will?" Hannibal wanted to touch him, but he remembered how the boy had reacted in the examination when his feet were touched. He held himself back, but reached under the bed. Simply holding out his palm in case the boy wanted his comfort. For a moment there was nothing, then a small hand took his. Hannibal gave him a comforting squeeze.

"Will, they’re gone. You can come out," Hannibal assured Will in a soft voice.

Will launched himself out from under the bed and into Hannibal's waiting arms. He was crying and his whole body trembled as he sobbed, "I'm bad! I'm bad! I'm bad!"

Hannibal pulled him more comfortably up on his lap; the boy's legs falling on either side of his waist as he held the boy tightly. He pressed his lips into the boy's damp curls and whispered to him, "It's alright baby, you're alright."

"He's right," Will choked out.

"Who?"

"The man."

"Jack? He's frustrated."

"No, he's right. I killed all those people- I'm- I'm a monster."

"You are not," Hannibal corrected sharply, making the boy jump slightly in his arms. "You adapted to your situation."

"I killed them," Will wailed.

"You evolved to survive. Nothing more. You became what you needed to become. Now it's over."

"It can't be over– it'll never be over, those people are dead because of me! Me!" Will hit his chest with his fist emphatically.

Hannibal grabbed his wrist, ceasing Will's assault on himself, "They're dead because of Dolarhyde."

"The dragon didn't kill them– I did. Why don't you understand? You've killed!"

"Hush, Will; you're speaking nonsense," Hannibal tried to silence the boy.

But Will sat up in his lap, he frowned at Hannibal seriously, "I know you have."

Hannibal's grip tightened around the boy's waist. "You don't know what you're talking about."

"The blood. I can smell it on you." Will's eyes were determined.

"We're in a hospital–"

"Stop it! Don't lie to me! Please don't lie to me."

Hannibal was silent, studying the boy as he pleaded for the truth. Will bravely stared back. His mouth was a hard line that quivered slightly on the edges. Hannibal couldn't help but admire his courage. Confronting a killer while sitting on said killer's lap was either extremely foolish or foolishly brave.

"I won't tell," Will whispered.

Hannibal pulled Will close, tucking the boy's head to his chest, nosing the boy's curls. Now was the time: snap the kid’s neck. Painless. It could be blamed on a fall or the boy attacking him. It would end Will’s suffering.

Hannibal's hand traveled from the boy's waist to his slim neck. A quick snap of the head and Will would fall limp. A sudden jerk and Hannibal would be safe. Will would take his secret to the grave. Hannibal squeezed the boy's neck, feeling his strong life force pulse beneath his finger tips.

Will gasped slightly at the feeling and tilted his head back further allowing Hannibal easier access. "Make it fast."

Hannibal's breath caught.

Make it fast.

A simple request of your murderer to kill you quickly. Will could see his intentions so easily. He read the older man without a thought. Hannibal couldn’t destroy such a precious and keen mind. He released the boy’s neck.

"I'm not going to kill you."

Will raised his head once more. His big blue eyes eyed Hannibal quizzically, "You were."

Hannibal sighed. It seemed pointless to lie to Will, he seemed to pick up every thought that entered his head. He carded a hand through Will’s messy curls and muttered softly, "I suppose I thought about it."

Will’s mouth quivered into a little smile, "Does that mean you believe me?"

Hannibal raised an eyebrow, "Believe you?"

"That I won't tell."

Hannibal was quiet for a moment. The boy could spill his secret. Tip off the FBI of a killer in their midst, but the way Will stared at him in earnest Hannibal knew he was safe for now. “There’s nothing to tell.”

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Hannibal held him for a long while, until his breathing wasn’t ragged. The taller man had picked him up and deposited him back on the bed. Hannibal sat on the edge of the bed, pulling the covers over Will’s legs and handing him the puppy Blue to hold.

Will couldn’t believe he was still breathing. When Hannibal had taken a hold of his neck, Will was sure he would die. The man’s fingers had curled around him, so steady and firm. He didn’t know if he was scared or comforted by the deadly hand.

The man had let him live. Will felt he owed Hannibal his loyalty and devotion. Hannibal could do anything to him and Will would let him. If the man raised his hand and struck him,

he’d cower and ask for more. If the man wanted to strip him bare and fuck him, Will would spread his legs eagerly.

The only thing he couldn’t bear was the man leaving him, so he clung to his arm, though he truly wanted to crawl inside the man

“Will, mylimasis, you must calm down. Jack Crawford is going to come talk to you.” Hannibal hushed him as Will attempted to crawl once more on the man’s lap.

Will whined, a needy pitiful sound that had Hannibal looking at him with concern. “Will, I won’t leave you. And he won’t yell again.”

“Please hold me?” Will asked as he tugged on the older man’s shirt.

Hannibal wrapped his arms around him. Will heard himself sigh as he nestled into the man’s chest. Snuggling into his warm embrace where all his fears were kept at bay. He was fairly certain he could live there forever.

A door opened and Will felt Hannibal tense. “Crawford. I just got him calm, can this wait a few more minutes?” He sounded angry, Will reminded himself to never get on the man’s bad side.

“No. I need his interview now. It’ll be brief, he can stay right there.” The new voice did not yell, but Will recognized it as the yelling man’s voice. It sounded strained with stress and false peasantry.

Will wanted to hide away, but a soothing voice coaxed him out, “Will, he’ll only ask you a few questions, I’ll be there the whole time. Do you think you can do that for me? I know you can, you're so brave and strong.”

Will blushed at Hannibal’s praise and emerged from the man’s arms flushed with happy embarrassment. “There’s my Will. Look at you,” Hannibal smiled at him and brushed a few messy curls back into place, “So brave.”

Jack cleared his throat. Will looked over. The yelling man had taken a seat, but his presence was still hostile. Despite Hannibal’s words, he shrunk back only to be met by an arm sweeping around his back. “It’s alright, darling,” Hannibal said kindly.

“Well,” Jack cleared his throat drawing the pair’s attention, “I think we’ll begin. This interview will be recorded," Jack placed a recorder on the table near him, "This is Jack Crawford from the FBI BAU, interviewing Will Graham, found on Francis Dolarhyde's property. Can you state your name for the record?"

Will glanced nervously at Hannibal who nodded encouragingly, "Will Graham, sir."

Jack eyed him for a moment before moving on, "We are joined also with Dr. Hannibal Lecter. Doctor, please voice your name for the record."

"This is Dr. Lecter."

With the recording established, Jack leaned into the questions, "Will, can you tell us a little about where you're from?"

"Louisiana," Will answered quickly, "But we moved around a lot."

"When you say we, do you mean you and your father?"

Will flinched at the mention of his father, "Y-yes, m-my dad and I."

"When did you come to Maryland?"

Will glanced at Hannibal, “T-three years ago.”

"Why the move?" Jack made a note.

"M-my dad got work here on some boats," Will recalled.

"Did you not want to move?"

Will shrugged, “M-my dad. He wanted it.”

“Not what I asked," Jack responded harshly, "Did you want to?”

“N-no, sir.”

Jack charged on, growing agitated, “Were you angry at your father for moving?”

Will looked up surprised, “No, sir, I–”

“You’re telling me you didn’t resent your father at all?”

Will shook his head, “We move around so much it don’t matter.”

Jack threw a file on the bed, it made the boy jump. “I have a warrant for your arrest in killing your father.”

Will’s eyes widened and he gaped at the man. “I ain’t never killed my dad!” His southern accent slipped through as he looked at Hannibal, terrified, “You have to believe me! Tell him, I didn’t kill my dad!”

“Mr. Graham!” Jack interrupted, demanding his attention, “If you didn’t kill your father, then you need to tell me exactly who did.”

“The dragon! The dragon killed him!”

“The Dragon?”

“Yes! The great red dragon! He was watching me and came like he said he would and he took me. He shot my dad!”

"Do you remember when this happened, darling?" Hannibal asked as he ran a calming hand up and down Will's back.

Will scrunched his face. He couldn't remember the dates. He only knew it had been three years because Hannibal had told him. "I don't know. I can't remember, b-but it was on a full moon."

"A full moon?" Jack asked.

"Dragons hunt on full moons," Will answered. The line came naturally having been fed to him over and over by the dragon.

"What is a dragon, Will?" Hannibal asked, hoping Jack would see the kids' innocence in his answers.

" *He's* the great red dragon. He wants to destroy the world. Watch it burn by his hand."

"You said dragons, Will. Does Dolarhyde have an accomplice? Another dragon?"

Will nodded looking down.

"Who are the other great red dragons?" Jack snapped, when Will didn't answer.

Will looked up startled, "There's only one great red dragon." He glanced between the men, astonished they didn't understand, "I'm just a little dragon."

Jack huffed in frustration, "Did the Dragon have any other little dragons?"

Will paled at the question. He hadn't thought about it before. Had the dragon kept any other boys? Had he stolen anyone else from their homes? He never saw anyone else. He knew he was the only one, no one else would have survived. Only he understood the dragon. "N-no. I don't think so, sir." He answered quietly.

"Will," Hannibal touched his chin, bringing his eyes to meet kind maroon ones, "If the great dragon is to destroy the earth. What is the little dragon to do?"

"Serve the great dragon," Will whispered. His mind chanted a litany: *obey him, fear him, love him.*

"How did you serve him? By killing with him?" Jack bit in an accusatory tone.

Will ducked his head, "No sir, I mean, yes. He wanted me to kill. He'd bring people and make me kill them. I never wanted to– you have to believe me, I didn't want to."

"Then why did you?" Jack spat.

Will covered his face, tears escaping down the sides of his face. "I had to," he cried, "they would scream and scream and scream. He made them scream. He would cut them and hurt them. He said I was the only one that could stop it. I tried to be strong, but some of them

would beg for me to stop it. I didn't want to I swear. The dragon wanted it. I didn't know what to do. I shouldn't have listened. I'm bad! I'm a monster!"

Will's hands covering his face turned to claws as he wailed. His fingernails digging into flesh, "I should have saved them! I let them die! I'm bad! I'm bad!"

It hurt. The feeling of failure. He let them die. He killed them. He could have done something. Anything to save them. The nails on his face hurt less than the guilt in his core. If he could dig his nails deep enough maybe he could get all his bad bits out.

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"I let them die! I let them die! I let them die!" Will kept repeating as he gripped his face. His nails beginning to break the skin.

Hannibal immediately grabbed the boy's hands, forcing them away from where the boy wanted to rip his skin apart. He already sat slightly behind the boy on the bed, so he quickly pulled Will's back to his chest. Wrapping his arms around the boy, holding Will's arms tightly against his body to prevent him from scratching himself.

"Will, you're ok. It's over," Hannibal spoke softly to calm him, but Will thrashed trying to break free. His words were a monotony of "I killed them" and "I let them die"s. He wasn't calming down no matter how much Hannibal whispered.

Jack stood up.

"WILL GRAHAM!" Jack bellowed, "Stop, right now!"

Will froze in Hannibal's arms. His voice dying on his lips as he stared at Crawford. Hannibal held him unsure if the boy's episode was over.

"Do not scratch yourself or others. DO you understand?" Jack yelled. Will did not move an inch, paralyzed with fear.

"I said, do you understand?" Jack thundered.

"Y-yes sir. I'm sorry sir. I'm really sorry," Will whimpered as he wriggled uncomfortably in Hannibal's arms. Hannibal released him and the boy immediately turned and buried his face in Hannibal's shirt.

"Jack–" Hannibal was about to give the director a piece of his mind, but Crawford interrupted him with a raised hand.

"We are almost finished, Dr. Lecter. Mr. Graham I'm talking to you, face me."

Will released Hannibal's now-tear stained shirt and turned, He slid off the bed and knelt facing the FBI director. Hannibal was surprised at Will's quick attentiveness. He recognized the tactic Crawford was using on Will, though he hated to admit it worked. Will was used to demands and orders not calming voices. Jack yelling and his short questions, forced the boy to focus.

“When did you last see the Dragon?” Jack asked, towering over the boy.

“Last night, sir,” Will answered immediately, keeping his eyes trained on the ground.

“What were you doing?” Jack barked.

Will was pale and shaking slightly, but answered without a beat, “I was sucking him off. He was gonna fuck me, but then he didn’t.”

“Why did he stop?”

“He got angry,” Will bit his lip, “I-I think he saw something on the computer.”

“What did he see?”

“I don’t know, sir, I’m sorry. I’m not allowed to look at the computer.”

“What did he do?”

“He got so angry. I thought he might whip me, but he just hit me when I didn’t go to the bedroom. I wasn’t thinking, he had to drag me up. He told me to stay and then he left. I didn’t stay though!” Will grabbed his hair as he realized his transgression, “I didn’t stay! Is he going to punish me? Please don’t tell him I left. I didn’t mean to–”

“Quiet, Will. Don’t pull your hair,” Jack ordered, before the boy could work himself into another panic and hurt himself. Jack waited for Will’s hands to fall obediently in his lap before he continued, “Did he take anything with him? Do you know what car he has?”

“H-he took his gun–”

“What gun?” Jack questioned sharply.

“His pistol with a silencer. He killed my dad and people with it.”

“And the car?”

“I’m sorry, sir, I don’t know. I think it’s black, but I’m not allowed to look out.” Will apologized. Jack huffed loudly, making the boy flinch and begin muttering, “I’m sorry, I’m sorry, sir, I’m sorry.”

“Will! Focus!” Jack ordered, making Will quiet his muttering. “Do you know where he might be going?”

“He got really angry at the lyin’ stupid bitch,” Will said slowly, “I thought he was talkin’ bout me, but he told me to shut-up. I think he wants to kill that bitch.”

“And who’s ‘that bitch’?” Jack asked.

Will shrugged, “On the computer.”

Jack frowned, but Hannibal had a sudden idea of who the bitch might be. “Jack, wasn’t Lound’s article released last night? Dolarhyde might have been following the cases and read the Fairy article.”

Jack’s eyes light up, “You’re right. We need to check on Miss Lounds.”

“Sir...” Will began to speak but trailed off unsure of himself.

Jack raised an eyebrow, “What, kid?”

“May I be done please, sir?” Will asked quietly.

“For today,” Jack told him. Will grinned like he won a prize and crawled over to Hannibal’s legs, wrapping his arms around them.

“Will,” Hannibal pulled him up from the ground. Will slotted himself against the older man’s chest and slumped over Hannibal’s body. Hannibal welcomed him, allowing the boy to nestle himself into the safety of his arms.

The boy was exhausted and depleted. He showed no signs of aggression, only fearful panic. The ferocity which was shown in the videos was gone, left was a broken vessel. Jack probably still didn’t want him out of his sight, which made Jack’s next words surprise Hannibal.

“I want you and Alana to find him a place.”

“A place?”

“A psychiatric center, a group home, something, but I want him under constant supervision. He’s still in FBI custody. He’s a criminal despite his psyche.”

Hannibal nodded, stroking the boy’s hair. Will could probably hear their conversation, but he was too exhausted and stressed to understand. Hannibal would look after him.

“You can take him whenever the hospital releases him. But I don’t want him far.” Jack warned. “If his story’s true, this Dolarhyde-dragon person will be back for him. The man will want his own little monster.”

“Of course, he won’t go far.” Hannibal agreed instantly. A thought was worming its way into his mind. One with Will eating at his table, reading in his library, and comfortably napping on his bed. It was an absurd thought, but as soon as he thought it, he knew he wanted the boy safely home with him. And Hannibal was never one to deny himself what he wanted.

Chapter 9

Will fell asleep quickly in Hannibal's arms. The young man was obviously not used to exerting so much energy. He slept like a dead man. The only sign of life was the steady stream of drool pooling from his lips onto Hannibal's shirt. Hannibal might have been upset at his ruined clothing, but now the action only endeared the boy to him.

Jack left quickly, on his way to search for Freddie Lounds, leaving Hannibal to act as the human body pillow for the boy.

Hannibal stayed unmoving for several hours, waving away the nurses and doctors who poked their heads in to check on him. When Alana finally returned she convinced him to leave the boy alone.

"Hannibal, that isn't comfortable for you or him." Alana said pointedly.

Hannibal wanted to disagree. Will seemed perfectly happy curled on his chest and Hannibal, though his neck did ache, was more than fine holding Will. However it seemed childish to continue all night so he let Alana talk him into resting the boy on the bed's pillows.

Once Will was situated and tucked in asleep, Hannibal and Alana collapsed on the hospital chairs. It was late, past midnight and the hospital lights had dimmed for the night crew. Hannibal rubbed his face, the first signs of weariness coming over him.

“You should go home,” Alana suggested.

Hannibal shook his head, “I told him I wouldn’t leave.”

Alana sighed, “You shouldn’t make promises you can’t keep.”

Hannibal grinned wryly at her, “What makes you think I would break my promise?”

“Because it’s not sustainable, Hannibal.”

Hannibal ignored her and changed the topic, “He needs a place to stay.”

“So Jack informed me on his way out,” Alana huffed, “He has nowhere to go. At his age the only options are a couple halfway houses or institutionalization.”

“I don’t wish to see him institutionalized. He isn’t insane, he’s just suffering from extreme PTSD.”

“Two years with that maniac would do it…” Alana trailed off into silence as they both watched Will sleep. It was peaceful sitting in the darkened room listening to Will’s breathing.

Alana broke the silence, “I have a friend who might be able to get him into a halfway house for those recently released from prison. There’s usually a waitlist, but I might be able to pull some strings.”

“I’m leery of sending him to a place where he may be taken advantage of. He doesn’t need to be surrounded by ex-cons.” Hannibal could imagine those men eying Will like a piece of meat. A protective urge surged in Hannibal, he would cut out anyone's eyes that looked at Will like that.

Alana sighed, “Well, there aren’t many other options, maybe there’s a homeless shelter, some asylmns–”

“Alana," Hannibal interrupted, determined to convince her Will should go with him, "I have practically finished my stay at the hospital. I am between career changes–”

“What are you talking about?” Alana asked, confused.

“I have amassed a decent amount of wealth. I have a large home and plenty of time on my hands.”

“What are you saying?”

“I could take him.”

Alana frowned, “You can’t be serious, Hannibal.”

“He needs a safe place. I have that.”

“Hannibal, I know you feel responsible for Will, but you can’t just adopt him into your life. It won’t be good for you or him.”

“I disagree. So far the only places we’ve discussed are a mental institution or a halfway house for criminals. He belongs in neither of those places. He deserves better.” Hannibal argued passionately.

“He does, but that doesn’t mean you're better. Hannibal you’ll foster a condition of dependency with him,” Alana reasoned.

Hannibal looked at her sharply, “He needs to be able to depend on someone. And to ease your worries, I’m not thinking of this as a long term solution. But surely while Dolarhyde is free and Will has no place to go, I could be a variable option.”

Alana eyed him seriously, she finally relented, looking away, “I suppose he could stay with you while we search for long term placements or working on independent living skills.”

Hannibal nodded but in his mind Will would not be leaving his side for the foreseeable future. Yes, he would foster greater independence in the young man, but he had no plan on allowing Will to enter into a group home or mental facility while his home was open. But Alana didn’t need to know that. Hannibal would let her plan away, and when a “solution” arose, Will could choose where he wanted to go, which would hopefully be to stay right by Hannibal.

“You are correct of course, Alana. It would only be for the short-term. We’ll help him get a job and set up a permanent place for him.”

Alana nodded, but a frown still worried her face.

“What’s wrong?”

“That’s a lot of work you're taking on, Hannibal. No one expects you to. You have no obligation to help him like that… So, I guess I need to know why? Why help him?”

Hannibal was quiet for a moment. He could tell her any number of reasons, from it being a moral duty, to religious reasoning, to an interesting case study, but he decided to tell her the truth. She was intuitive afterall, and might read his lies.

“When I first saw him, he instantly reminded me of someone dear to me from a long time ago. They were precious to me and I failed to protect them. To see someone hurting in a similar manner,” Hannibal’s breath caught pushing away thoughts of his beloved sister, “Well, it has brought all sorts of memories and ‘what-if’s to my mind. I can’t bear to fail again.”

Hannibal turned and met Alana’s eyes. She was studying him. Hannibal swallowed, “I hope you don’t see me as trying to fulfill my own selfish desires. I just simply cannot, not help him. It would feel like a sin. And I know it sounds trivial but I hope that puts your mind at ease.”

“Not at all, Hannibal,” Alana rested a hand over Hannibal’s, “Your heart’s in the right. And for what it’s worth, I don’t think he could be in more capable hands.”

They stayed like that semi-holding hands, voweling in their hearts to look after the sleeping figure. He smiled thinking of Alana’s reaction to his idea. He was proud of her for standing up for Will. She had confronted him, yes, but he had won her over in the end. Now, to see how Crawford would react. He probably wouldn’t care, as long as he caught the Tooth Fairy. Hannibal would do his best to keep Will out from under the FBI’s watchful eye. Hannibal wanted him to slip by unnoticed, so terrors like Crawford would leave him be.

Eventually, Hannibal caught Alana nodding off and sent her home in a late night (practically morning) taxi. He left Will asleep under the careful watch of Nurse Henderson before grabbing himself a bitter coffee from the hospital’s cafeteria.

It was the early morning hours and the day shift staff were beginning to filter into the hospital. Hannibal decided to go searching for Will’s presiding doctor. Though Will was severely malnourished and did have severe injuries, none required him to stay hospitalized. Once Hannibal got the doctor to sign Will’s dismissal and he'd be released into Hannibal's custody. Hannibal allowed himself a small smile to play on his face.

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Will woke up in a dark hospital room. He remembered what had happened. He was rescued. He was free. A happy joy bubbled in his heart. Blue was at his side. He could smell the sterile cleaners of the hospital and linen of the sheets. He was safe, warm, and happy.

While he enjoyed the comforts of the room, what Will truly wanted was Hannibal. The man's warm arms and his soft accented words. He made him feel special. He glanced around the room for the older man, he spotted a tall figure watching him across the room. Will called to him hopefully, "Hannibal?"

The figure stepped forward, into the light of the half moon. His towering presence looming over the boy dangerously. That was not Hannibal.

The dragon sneered at the boy, "Have you forgotten me already, little one?"

Will trembled. How had the dragon found him? How was he here? How could he have been so stupid. He was not free. He'd never be free. The dragon owned him– possessed his very soul. He felt his lips moving as he stuttered out, "G-great dragon."

"Yes, little one, you remember who you belong to," The dragon smiled, his teeth glinting menacingly, "I told you to stay. Yet you ran away from me."

"No, I would never!" Will panicked, "They took me! I didn't want to leave– I would never leave you!"

"Pretty words from a liar," The dragon spat, "You know what happens to liars, little one?"

Will scrambled backward on the bed until he hit the headboard. Trapped as the dragon stalked closer. Of course he knew what happened to liars: pain. So much pain. "Please," He begged, raising his hands placatingly, "I'm sorry, great dragon, please– just take me back! Please!"

The dragon growled and he was suddenly on top of Will, ripping his clothes away. Will sobbed but made no move to stop the dragon. He was an unstoppable force, the boy could do nothing. Claws like nails raked down his sides and the Dragon gripped him by the hips, flipping him on his stomach. The dragon shoved his face down on the bed. Will felt dizzy and disoriented. He could feel the dragon above him. The man's naked cock dragged between Will's ass cheeks, probing at Will.

"Who do you belong to?" The dragon growled into Will's ear.

Will sobbed, "You! Great Dragon!"

The dragon thrust into him. Will screamed the blinding pain of being entered, almost making him black out. It was too much. The dragon was everywhere and it hurt like he was being crushed and ripped apart all at the same time.

Suddenly, he was no longer in the hospital. He was back at the house in the dragon's lair. No soft hospital linens, no yellow stuffed dogs. The ground was hard and wet. The dragon was above him, over him, moving inside him. Claiming him and fucking him on the blood soaked living room floor.

Will's vision spun as he tried to orient himself. His hazy eyes traveled from the red staining his face and floor to the bodies around him. Piles of bodies all around them. He gasped as he

recognized the faces. There were the nurses– butchered and bleeding. There was Alana, her throat ripped open, blood pouring down.

Will choked back a scream. Next to her lay Hannibal. His eyes gouged from his face and his head severed from his body. No more the kindly eyes, only blood and waste. He was dead.

Dead.

Hannibal's sickening mouth opened and a familiar accented voice rang out, "You've killed us, Will."

Blood poured from the dead's speaking mouth. Spilling from the man's lips. A river of blood flooded the room. Will couldn't contain his scream as the blood covered him. It filled his mouth and ran through his nose. Choking him until he couldn't breathe. He thrashed about, but the dragon held him down as he drowned in an ocean of blood.

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Will's screams sent Hannibal running back to the room. He cursed himself for leaving the boy as he rounded into the hospital room. Will wason the ground fighting tangled sheets that must have tumbled with him from the bed.

Nurse Henderson was attempting to wake him, yelling, "Will! Wake up Will!"

The nurse dodged a flying arm as Will flailed about still screaming and yelling. She waved Hannibal over, "He won't wake up."

Hannibal pulled the sheets from over the boy, hoping he would stop fighting if he didn't feel trapped. Now free from his bindings, Will curled up and began sobbing.

"Will! Wake up darling," Hannibal grabbed the boy's shoulders urgently.

Will jerked as his eyes opened. His eyes were rimmed red and wide, his cheeks stained with tears. Will's eyes darter about the room before settling on the man. "Hannibal?!" He cried in disbelief. He launched himself at the older man, wrapping his arms around Hannibal's neck, "Y-you died! The dragon killed you!"

"You were dreaming, darling. It's alright. You're safe now." Hannibal hugged the boy back, nosing his face into his sweat-damp curls.

"He's coming for me," WIll cried into Hannibal's neck, "He's going to get me and kill everyone!"

Hannibal pulled away, forcing Will to look him in the eye, "He is not going to have you."

Will whimpered, "But he's coming."

"He will not have you, baby..Do you hear me? I won't allow it." Hannibal snarled.

Will quited immediately remembering how terribly dangerous Hannibal was. He bowed his head in deference. "Yes, sir."

"Will, I–" the man stopped himself and pulled Will close, "I'm sorry Mylimasis. I didn't mean to shout."

Will nodded content to accept whatever Hanniba told him. He'd rather have a scary Hannibal than the Dragon. He snuggled closer to the man, listening to his heart beat. The man was alive. The dragon hadn't gotten him.

"I have some good news for you, Will," Hannibal hummed into Will's curls.

Will said nothing, electing to wait for the older man to simply tell him the news Hannibal gently ran his hands up and down Will's back, "Alana and I have discussed it, and we believe the best place for you to go is with me. You may stay at my home while the investigation continues and you get back on your feet. Does that sound agreeable to you?"

Will shyly peeked up at Hannibal, "I can stay with you?"

"Yes, if that is what you'd like, there are other options if you're uncomfortable–"

"No! I want to stay with you!" Will interjected. He worried the man would turn him away if he delayed. He wanted desperately to stay with Hannibal, but he was worried he'd displease the man. He couldn't comprehend anyone wanting him voluntarily except the dragon.

Hannibal smiled, "I want you to stay with me as well."

Will blushed at the way Hannibal looked at him. The dragon never looked at him like that. The dragon always looked at Will as if he were an object to be used. The monster demanded his devotion, despite how he used Will for his own carnal desires. But the way Hannibal looked at him sent chills down the boy's spine. It was as if simply being with Will was enough to make the older man happy. Will prayed he continued to please Hannibal, though he didn't quite know what Hannibal liked so much.

Hannibal helped him back in bed and laid him back. Nurses began bustling in the room, handing him Blue, and telling him they were preparing his dismissal from the hospital. The nurses removed his IV, which was terrifying, but Will was happy it was gone. They brought more broth and told him to eat it slowly, though it was all gone within two minutes. He didn't speak the whole time, hoping to be a good boy for Hannibal. Even when Hannibal stood to go talk to his doctor, he stayed quiet, though he wished the man would stay with him.

The nurses fussed around him complimenting and commenting on everything. Which made the young man flush and duck his head away from their sweet words. But the nurses didn't mind and continued nonetheless.

"Is this your new puppy?" Nurse Abayomi asked, pointing to Blue, which Will squeezed tightly in his arms.

Will nodded shyly. "Blue," he whispered.

"Blue?" The nurse asked.

"That's his name," Hannibal called from outside the room.

"Blue! Now that's a lovely name! Did you know I have two puppies at home?" Nurse Amayomi asked.

Will shook his head.

“You want to see my dogs?" Nurse Abayomi asked as she pulled out her phone. She scrolled through until she found the photos, "There they are."

Will look at the outstretched screen. On it were two small white dogs seemingly smiling at the camera. Will grinned at the dogs. They were real animals. They seemed cuter than all his make-believe dogs. He wondered what they’d be like in real life, but his thoughts were interrupted as Nurse Henderson wheeled in a wheelchair. "Alrighty, Will, let's get you loaded up. You think you can make it to the chair from the bed?"

Will frowned, he could walk. They hadn’t let him walk much, but he could. He didn’t want to be a burden on them. "I can walk, ma'am."

"Good. A little walk to the wheelchair. It's hospital rules, patients get wheeled out. Now come on over dear."

"Where's Hannibal?" Will asked nervously not seeing the older man anywhere.

"Right here, Will," Hannibal answered by the door, "I was just talking to your doctors, you're all set to be released. Go ahead and get in the wheelchair, I'll be right there."

Hannibal ducked out again, making Will nervous all over again. But he obediently followed direction and climbed out of bed. Nurse Henderson held the handles of the chair while Abayomi hovered near ready to catch him in case he fell. Thankfully, he made it over and collapsed in the seat.

"Good job, Will!" Abayomi praised. She held out her hand for a high five. Will hadn't been given a high five since middle school, he hesitantly raised his hand and touched her's. It must not have meant a lot to her because she just smiled and went to gather a few of his bags. Meanwhile Will couldn't believe she had let him touch her. Wasn’t she afraid of getting dirty?

They wheeled him out of the hospital room where Hannibal stood chatting with a short doctor.

"Mr. Graham," She smiled, "It's good to see you awake. You probably don't remember me, I'm Dr. Johnson. I was your presiding doctor yesterday when you first arrived. I wanted to tell you about some medications we'll be sending home with you, alright?"

Will blinked, completely lost what to do. Thankfully the doctor took his silence as agreement as she launched into an explanation of the medicine. By the time she was finished, Will's head ached with information. He could not remember all her words. What medicine was he

supposed to take in the morning? Which one should he only take after eating? He wrung his hands and glanced nervously at Hannibal.

Hannibal politely intervened as soon as he saw Will's lost eyes. "Thank you, Doctor. He'll be under FBI custody for a while, so I will ensure he takes the proper medicine."

Hannibal took the bag of pill bottles and ushered the posse down the hall. Hannibal walked ahead of them with such confidence. Like he owned the hospital. The yelling man (Jack Crawford, Will reminded himself) had called him Dr. Lecter. Hannibal was a doctor? He supposed it made sense. The man was so at ease in the hospital.

As they neared the doors, Will felt his stomach turn. He was going outside. He knew he had gone outside when Hannibal took him out of the house, but he hadn't been conscious. He hadn't stood under the sky in so long. He was scared it might swallow him whole. Or what if the doors shocked him?

He pulled his legs up on the wheel chair. Wrapping his arms around his legs and ducking his face between his knees. He felt the wheelchair slow to a stop as Nurse Henderson realized something was wrong.

"Will, you okay, sweetie?" She asked. The rest of the parade of people around him had also stopped. Will felt like an asshole for stopping their journey. He shook his head 'no', but did not look up.

"Will, it's alright. You can tell us what's wrong." Hannibal's voice was right by him; Will peeked up and saw the man was kneeling in front of him. His eyes were full of patience and he was genuinely concerned. It made Will feel worse about causing a fuss. How could he explain he was scared of going outside? The outside had no hands to hit him or teeth to bite him. He shouldn't be afraid. And yet he was.

He hugged himself tighter, blocking out Hannibal. He couldn't explain it to them.

He heard Hannibal sigh. The older man was disappointed, Will knew it. Hannibal hated him. He'd probably leave Will at the hospital or drop him off on some abondoned road, it only made sense, no one would want him.

"Would you rather walk, sweetie?" Nurse Henderson asked, trying to be helpful.

Will shook his head. His throat felt constricted and his tongue too dry to speak. Why couldn't he be brave and just go through the doors?

"Will, can you show us what's wrong?" Hannibal asked.

Will looked at the sliding doors at the end of the reception room. The sunlight streaming through. He wanted to say something, but couldn't. Thankfully, Hannibal followed his eyes to the doors. He was quiet for a moment studying the scene.

"Nurse Hendersen, Why don't you take Will to the parking garage. I don't think he's ready to go outside."

Will's head jerked up. Surprised written all over his face. Hannibal smiled softly, "Is that alright, Mylimasis? The garage is attached to the building so you don't have to go outside."

Will nodded, his throat finally letting him speak, "Th-thank you Hannibal."

"I will bring the car around, and meet you there. The nurses will stay with you," Hannibal carded his hand through the boy's hair, Will leaned into his touch, "I will be right back for you, baby."

With that, Hannibal stood and walked out through the sunny doors. Will felt his heart squeeze with anxiety as Hannibal disapeared, but he had no time to think on it, as the nurses turned and wheeled him back down the white washed walled hall way. The made several turns as they zigzagged through the maze of the building until they eached another set of sliding doors. There was no blinding light. The nurses took him through the doors, where the chilly morning air made his skin prickle.

But there was Hannibal, emerging from a shiny car a few yards away. Hannibal was by his side in a blink of an eye and Will found himself being helped from the chair and into the passenger seat, the older man's arm wrapped securely around his waist. When he settled against the cool leather seat, Hannibal covered him with a blanket, "Try to rest, Will, it's a long drive."

"Ok," Will agreed as he snuggled down in the seat, making Hannibal chuckle. Hannibal closed the door leaving Will cacconed in warmth. The comforting smell of Hannibal washing over him. Hannibal put the shopping bags Alana had brought in the trunk and walked around to the driver's side and climbed in.

"Ready to go?" Hannibal asked. Will nodded. The car pulled away and out of the parking garage. Will gasped as the car drove out. He was astonded by how bright and colorful everything was. The sky was a blinding blue blotched with white puffy clouds. There were trees and plants. So many moving things– cars, people, animals. Will didn't know where to look but unable to look away from any of it.

He kept his face pressed against the glass as if his eyes couldn't gobble up enough of the sights. His blanket and Blue were forgotten, and all hope of rest gone. Hannibal didn't correct him though. He let the boy take in the world, enjoying Will's little gasps and sighs.

The hour drive was gone in no time. Hannibal's large house coming into view. The boy suddenly remembered Hannibal as they pulled into the drive of the house. Will turned to him, his eyes wide, "This is your house?"

Hannibal grinned at him, pride rolling off him at impressing the kid, "Yes, do you like it?"

"

It's wonderful," Will said in aw, "It's so big."

Hannibal laughed, "Yes, all the more reason for you to come stay with me."

Chapter 10

Will pinched his arm when Hannibal wasn’t looking, just to make sure he wasn’t dreaming.

They pulled into the doctor’s huge garage. Hannibal closed the large door, blocking the terrifying unknown, before exiting the car. He grabbed Will’s new belongings and helped the boy out of the car. Will clinging to Hannibal's arm, wide eyed and terrified.

They entered Hannibal’s kitchen which Will was certain was bigger than his father’s old trailer. There was a comfy chair in the kitchen’s corner that Hannibal sat him in. The chair faced the main kitchen as if it were a stage for Hannibal to perform on for an audience of one. Will assumed Hannibal must host people often while he cooked. Will watched, playing an avid audience member, as Hannibal pulled ingredients from his fridge.

"It's rather late for breakfast, but how do you feel about brunch? Eggs, toast, pancakes. Maybe a protean scramble?" Hannibal asked all the while gathering supplies for the meal.

Will nervously fidgeted with Blue. Hadn't he just eaten at the hospital? Maybe it was a test, to see if he was truly grateful, so he shrugged, "I'm not hungry, sir."

Hannibal waved him off, "Nonsense. It's lunch time, I'll make enough for both of us. And it's Hannibal, Will."

Will supposed he could eat. He was always hungry so eating was never a bad thing, especially when he didn't know when he'd get his next meal.

"Have you ever had quail eggs, Will?" Hannibal interrupted his thoughts.

Will's gaze jerked back up. "No, sorry. Is that ok?"

"Of course it's fine. I would be honored to cook you new food. Quail is a smaller bird than a chicken, so their eggs are very small. But I happen to think they hold more flavor, especially since the farm I buy them from raises them on a large meadow. Grazing on native plants and insects always enhances the flavor."

Will had no idea how to respond to that so he just stared. Hannibal didn't seem to notice as he rattled off more facts about organic farms and quail eggs.

"But perhaps you don't enjoy eggs, would you like pancakes or perhaps crepes?”

“I like everything,” Will stated.

“Surely you have a favorite breakfast food?" Hannibal pried, wanting to please Will.

"My favorite food?" Will asked. He hadn't thought of his own preferences in a long while. If it was edible he'd eat it. He ate whatever the dragon gave him, even choking down moldy

bread once. It wasn't about taste, it was about substance. Being asked to choose for preference was confusing.

"Maybe a favorite when you were a child?" Hannibal coaxed.

Will felt his mouth water thinking about all the spicy Cajun food he used to always eat in Louisiana. His father would do odd jobs around a fisherman's restaurant, fixing their generator, fridges, boats and even thatching their roof. They got paid in food. Wonderful jumbo, more shrimp than he could eat, and spicy sausage that sent him to another plane.

He thought of the street vendors that would sell their delightful sweets, calling out to passerbyers in creole. His father never had enough money to buy from them. One day when Will was small, the smells of freshly made beignets tempted him beyond his control. He stole some, slipping the powdery sweet from the platter when the vendor wasn't looking and slipping into the crowd. When he came home with his prize in hand, his father had taken one look at him and had taken him over his knee. Will never stole again, but he still wished he'd eaten the treats. He had to contend with licking the sugar from his fingers. Will never found out what happened to the pastries, but he had sneaking suspicion his father had eaten them.

He always wanted those pastries, and Hannibal seemed to want to give him something he liked. So he decided to shyly ask him, "Beignets?"

Hannibal raised an eyebrow in surprise, but recovered quickly, "Of course, those may take several hours to prepare, how about I make them after we've eaten lunch and seen the house, yes?"

Will nodded enthusiastically. He didn't mind waiting at all. Hannibal prepared a large breakfast spread. He moved with absolute ease in the kitchen, flawlessly slicing and cooking the food. Soon, fruit, toast, eggs, sausage, and a buttery stack of pancakes all were dished out on plates. Hannibal gestured for Will to join him at the counter. Will perched himself on one of the stools, his mouth watering from the food's aroma. Hannibal leaned over the other side of the counter, his elbows resting on the marble as he scooped some eggs onto his fork.

"Please," Hannibal gestured to Will's plate, "Eat."

Will didn't waste a second grabbing his fork and stabbing the sausage and ripping a chunk from it. It was incredible. The flavors burst in his mouth and he couldn't help but moan at the taste.

Hannibal tried to keep his composure as Will ate, but the sounds the boy made were indecent. The little groans and sighs sent blood rushing in all the wrong places. And the way Will wrapped his lips around the sausage–

"Are you alright?"

Hannibal looked up in Will's bright blue eyes. He was looking at him curiously, his head cocked to the side and a bit of oil dripping down the side of his pretty mouth to his chin. Hannibal couldn't stand the sight of him looking so utterly innocent and debauched at the same time. He reached over the counter.

Will froze as Hannibal's hand drew near. Not daring to move as Hannibal approached. His breath caught when fingers touched his chin. A thumb carefully wiped away the juice on his lips.

Will's lips parted as Hannibal touched him. Hannibal had the overwhelming urge to slide his thumb into the boy's mouth. Just to see how it felt to run his thumb over his tongue.

He drew back, immediately disgusted at himself for the thought. "I'm sorry, Will. Here," He handed him a cloth napkin, "Use this if you need to."

Will took it, patting his face clean. He wasn't sure what quite happened but Hannibal seemed uncomfortable now. He hoped he hadn't caused that. He tried to smooth over the situation, "Thank you, Hannibal. Your cooking is delicious."

“You’re welcome,” Hannibal smiled tensely at him and then continued to eat his own meal. They both continued in silence until they were finished. Will scraped his plate clean and looked at it like he might want to lick it too. When he finally realized that no more food would come from the ceramic, he glanced at Hannibal through his eye lashes. The man was watching him carefully, "Do you want more?"

Will didn't think he could eat another bite. His stomach felt heavy and the food felt like it might bubble up his throat. He shook his head, "No, thank you. I don't think I've ever felt this full."

Hannibal chuckled, "I'm glad you're not hungry, hopefully all that food doesn't make you too sleepy, because before we see the house I have a few rules to go over."

Will immediately put his fork down, his hands folding neatly on his lap. His entire attention was devoted to the older man. The dragon had rules too. So many that Will would forget and disobey accidentally. He didn't want to do that with Hannibal.

Hannibal smiled at the way Will instantly came to attention. "The first rule is that you should eat whatever you like, whenever you like. I expect you to eat three meals a day, but you may have more."

Will's mouth fell open again in surprise. That was a strange and wonderful rule. He wasn't quite sure if the man was joking or not. He was only fed when the dragon allowed him, but Hannibal went on.

"You're welcome to my pantry and fridge, and if you'd like something I don't have, I'll get it for you," Hannibal smiled at the boy's shocked face, "Does that sound agreeable to you?"

"Yes, sir," Will whispered in disbelief.

"None of that, please call me Hannibal,"

"Thank you, Hannibal." Will repeated obediently.

"Now, it's important to tell me if you need to leave the house. I don't want to scare you but Crawford has put a security detail around the house. If you leave without me or Alana or

someone else from the FBI, they will stop you. Do you think you can do that?"

Will shivered at the thought of agents grabbing him. He remembered the cold rush of a tranquilizer in his arm. He didn't want to be drugged. He also didn't want to leave. The dragon had forced him to stay, but now, with Hannibal, he had the option to leave, all he wanted to do was stay.

"I'm a good boy. I won't leave," Will said automatically, puppeting what the Dragon liked to hear. He hoped Hannibal liked how good he could be. He wanted to thank the man any way he could.

Hannibal frowned slightly, he didn't want Will to think of his home as a prison. The teen had lived in a hell-like prison for the past couple years, Hannibal wanted to give him freedom where he could. He tried to clarify, "You are free to go whenever, just inform us before you leave so we can arrange a chaperone."

Will frowned, shaking his head, "I won't leave. I'm a good boy."

Hannibal sighed. It would take a lot more work to get Will comfortable. He didn't dwell on the issue and moved on, "The last rule is to tell me if you need anything. My home is your home, if you want anything just tell me and I'll get it for you."

Will's forehead crinkled in confusion, "I don't need anything. I'm a good boy. I'm quiet and I won't eat a lot. And I won't choke on your cock and I don't squirm unless you want me to. A-and I can be pretty for you. You can fuck me good and hard, I can take it, sir. I'll do anything you want. I'm a good b–"

Will found himself yawning before he could finish.

Hannibal ignored Will's comments, moving forward before the boy could describe any other sexual practices he was good at, "You are a good boy," Hannibal agreed, watching as Will struggled to keep his eyes open, "But I think you need sleep. Come along, let me show you to the bedroom."

Will wanted to argue that it was the middle of the day and he wasn't tired. But his body betrayed him and made him yawn again. The food in his stomach felt heavy and his body seemed to be moving in slow motion. He tried to blink to attention, but ended up closing his eyelids for too long.

"Will?"

"'m sorry, sir, I mean, Han–" he yawned again, "--nibal."

Hannibal walked around the counter to where the sleepy Will was trying desperately to keep his eyes open. Hannibal ran his hand through Will's curls. The boy hummed happily and slumped forward against Hannibal's chest. Hannibal wrapped his arms around Will.

"Would you like me to carry you?"

"I can walk," Will huffed grumpily.

"Would you like to walk?" Hannibal asked with raised eyebrows

Will glanced shyly up at Hannibal. He answered slowly, "No…"

He ducked quickly down. Hiding from Hannibal's perceptive eyes.

"Then I will carry you if you have no objections," Hannibal waited half a second before scooping Will up off the stool. Will wrapped his legs easily around the man’s waist,

"Blue! I need Blue!" Will whined in Hannibal's arms, remembering the stuffed animal he left sitting on the comfy chair.

"He's right here," Hannibal swept the dog up as he went by. Will snuggled close to the stuffie. From what Will could tell from, buried in Hannibal's shirt, the house was ginormous. Will was certain he would get lost if left alone. So he clung to Hannibal as the man climbed up a flight of stairs and down a long hallway. Hannibal entered a large sunny room where Will was gently placed on a soft comforter.

Will surveyed the room with a sleepy gaze. The bed sat in the middle of the room with sandy wood furniture arranged throughout the room. There was a door that Will assumed was a bathroom and another thrown open revealing an empty closet. But the room was dominated by huge bay windows that looked out onto a beautiful green back yard. His eyes locked on the sunny visage. The dragon’s room had no windows, and the rest of the windows in the house were covered with heavy curtains. Will never looked out, not daring to evoke the dragon’s anger or set off the electric shackle. But the sunlight streaming through the big windows reminded him of Louisiana. He felt instantly at home.

Hannibal pulled back the covers and gestured for Will to crawl in. Will did so, managing to maneuver under the blankets before collapsing beneath their warmth.

"There now, rest well Will," Hannibal tucked the blankets around him, "I'll be downstairs making the beignets. They'll be ready when you wake."

Hannibal leaned down and placed a gentle kiss on the boy's forehead. Will didn't notice– already drifting off in the warm sunny room. Hannibal messed with the blankets, making sure Will was comfortably in place before convincing himself to leave the boy to sleep.

He left Will's room, leaving the door cracked, so Will would know the door was unlocked and he was free to roam. The master bed room was directly across from Will's room. Hannibal wanted to be as close as possible in case Will had any other nightmares in the night.

Instead of heading straight downstairs, he went into his room. While Will's room was bright and cheery, Hannibal's large suite was dark. The overtones of maroons and deep oak always calmed the older man. His room was his sanctuary. He could delight in the macabre and flaunt his almost castle-like dispositions. He bypassed the large fireplace and the four post king bed to his bathroom. He changed out of his day old clothes and hopped into the shower. Letting the warm water rinse away his weariness.

As the torrid of water washed away the filth of the day, Hannibal had the sudden realization that there was a nineteen year old traumatized victim in his guest bedroom that he promised he'd care for.

"What are you doing, Hannibal?" He grumbled to himself.

He shut the shower off and dried off, quickly throwing on comfortable lounge pants and a red sweater. He left his room, checking on Will to see a mess of dark curls still asleep on the pillows. He quietly left and went downstairs. He went to his study and packed away all his morbid drawings of his killings. Next, he removed his bag with his kill suit and favorite knives to the basement, locking them away in his storage cabinets. He always cleaned up after himself, so there was no blood to be seen. He wheeled the steel operation table to the corner and covered it with a cloth. There was no easy way to hide the operation table but he could always say it was from his passion as a surgeon. Lastly, he climbed from his basement, closing the trap door and re-positioned the table over it.

Will wouldn't find it, Hannibal told himself, and if he did, Hannibal was certain the boy would stay quiet. He sighed, why did he have to bring Will into his perfectly wonderful murder-filled life? It's not like Hannibal really wished to stop killing, it would just be more difficult hulling bodies through the garage while Will slept just upstairs.

Hannibal huffed in annoyance, but instantly remembered Will's innocent cries for help and his seemingly all knowing eyes that looked straight to his core.

Hannibal sighed. Whatever difficulties or changes came from Will's presence would surely be outweighed by the delightful curiosities the boy managed to spur in Hannibal's mind. Hannibal really wanted to check on the young man. To stand in the doorway and stare, but he convinced himself into making the beignet dough before running up the stairs and looking in.

Will was still asleep, and Hannibal had to return downstairs. As he waited for the dough to rise, he paced up and down his kitchen aisle trying to calculate exactly what he wanted to do with the strange curiosity now sleeping upstairs. Thankfully his phone rang before he could get too lost in his schemes.

"How is he?" Alana asked straight away.

"Asleep," Hannibal answered, "He ate lunch and fell right asleep. His body is exhausted."

"Has he settled, alright? Does he need anything?" Alana worried.

"He hasn't even seen the whole house. I had to carry him to his room," Hannibal didn't mention that he had offered and rather enjoyed carrying the young man around.

"Has he opened up any more?"

"Not much, when we left the hospital he was afraid to go outside. We may have budding agoraphobic tendencies. He's terrified of leaving anywhere without permission."

Alana hummed, "We'll need to work on that. What are you doing now?"

Hannibal was pacing and a worried mess but he didn't tell her that, "Making beignets."

Alana whistled, "Culturing him already?"

"Actually, he suggested them. His favorite food."

"Really? That's great that he's sharing!" Alana said, surprised.

"From his record he grew up in the South. Near New Orleans mostly. Beignets are a southern favorite."

"So he already knows French cuisine. Tell me, has the great Hannibal actually made beignets?"

Hannibal huffed, leave it to Alana to bring up his insecurity over cooking new dishes without testing it first. "Not the American variety. But I'm following a recipe."

Alana had the audacity to laugh, "Better make 'em well, you've got a Louisiana native."

Hannibal sighed and rubbed his brow, "Thankfully, he's not a picky eater."

"I'm sure you'll make him one very quickly," Alana responded dryly.

"I'll open his eyes to taste, much like I have your's."

"You made me a picky eater. And I resent you for it." Alana said seriously.

Hannibal laughed, "How have I made you picky? Name one food you no longer eat."

"Frozen pizza," She answered without missing a beat.

"Hardly a food."

"See?" Alana laughed. "Since the only food in my freezer is "hardly a food", I demand you feed me. I'm coming over for beignets."

Hannibal didn't necessarily enjoy Alana inviting herself over, but her company would be appreciated. Will needed other influences in his life, and Alana he could control. "I would love to have you over. Come quickly, I have dishes for my sous chef to wash."

Alana laughed, "I'll be over soon."

*

The sun was low in the sky, sending golden light through the large windows, when Will decided to finally open his eyes. He'd been awake for a while but was content laying in bed and taking in all the sensations of the room.

Everything was the opposite of the dragon's lair. It had smelled like death, was dark, and Will had never been able to get warm. But here everything was different. There was a soft pillow

under his head, the warm blanket over him. Blue was snuggled in the crook of his arm. The air smelled fresh and clean. The sunlight was dazzling through the window.

Will glanced over at the door out of the room. It was open and he could hear voices below. He turned and looked out the huge windows. Around the edge of the window was an inviting window seat with cushions and fluffy pillows. Will really wanted to sit on it and look out. He nervously looked at the door wondering if Hannibal would allow it.

Maybe I can sit real quick and then get back in the bed. Hannibal would never know. Will slid out from the cover and crawled to the edge of bed as quietly as he could. He hesitantly stepped on the carpeted floor (no creaks thankfully) and tiptoed to the window seat.

There were birds eating from a feeder down below and the spring flowers filled Hannibal's yard with a myriad of colors. Will meant to only sit for a moment, but before he knew it, he was kneeling on the cushions with his face and hands plastered against the cool glass in wonder.

He didn't hear the footsteps on the stairs nor the door opening wide.

"Will?"

Will jumped from the window seat, whipping around to see Hannibal in the doorway.

"I didn't mean to!" Will yelped before he could think.

Hannibal frowned. A look that frightened the boy. Frowns never bore well for him. They meant anger and anger meant pain. Will scrambled away from the window and jumped back in bed.

"What's wrong?" Hannibal demanded as he strode into the room, all at once concerned.

“I’m sorry, sir!” Will whimpered, pulling the blankets around him.

Hannibal walked quickly to the window and peered out, nothing was out of the ordinary. He turned back to Will who was huddled on the bed looking terrified.

“What’s wrong, Will?” Hannibal asked again, this time more softly.

“I left the bed. I’m sorry. I should have asked you first,” Will apologized, twisting the blanket nervously.

Hannibal’s worried frown dropped, replaced with a sad smile, “You don’t have to apologize Will. Remember what I told you? You’re free to go wherever you’d like.”

Will glanced at Hannibal, surprise written all over his face, “Really?”

“Of course, just remember, if you’d like to leave the house, you simply need to tell me.”

“I don’t want to leave,” Will said immediately, “I want to stay with you forever.”

Hannibal’s heart tightened with tenderness for the young man. "I'm glad you like it here."

"I love it here, sir," Will corrected shyly.

"Even better," Hannibal smiled, "Now would you like some beignets?"

Will's eyes widened, "But we just ate."

"You've slept for a while Will, It's almost eight. I'm sure you'd like some dinner."

Will glanced at the window. The sun was low in the sky. It didn't feel like he slept for that long. He wasn't hungry, but he supposed he should eat if Hannibal offered. "Okay." He agreed slowly.

"Alana is here. Is it alright if she joins us for dinner?" Hannibal asked.

"Blue likes Alana," Will stated as he squeezed the stuffed animal to his chest.

Hannibal nodded as he walked around the bed to where Will perched. "That's good. Do you?"

Will shrugged.

"I can send her away if you want."

"What?" Will asked, taken aback.

"If she makes you nervous or you feel uncomfortable."

"You don't have to– I mean, I wouldn't want to– I mean I–I–" Will stuttered, unsure of what Hannibal wanted him to say.

Hannibal cursed himself internally. He couldn't give Will such open ended choices. The responsibility would be too much for the boy. He placed a calming hand on Will's shoulder. "It's alright, baby. I'm sure Blue knows best. Alana will stay."

Will nodded immediately conceding to whatever Hannibal said.

"And since you can clearly run and jump very quickly, let's walk downstairs, yes?"

Will blushed profusely. Embarrassed by his earlier fright. Clearly the kind man wasn't going to punish him for looking out the window.

Hannibal helped Will from the bed. Running a critical eye over his wrinkled clothes, but choosing to say nothing. They left the room, Hannibal guiding him with a hand on his back while Will hugged Blue to his chest.

"My room is right here," Hannibal pointed out his bedroom right across the hall, "You may go in there whenever you'd like especially if you need me. I don't mind you waking me."

Will nodded looking bashfully at the room. They went down the hall to the stairs. Down stairs thru another hall and thru another doorway to the dining room.

It felt like a flurry of movement and an endless journey all at the same time. It left Will breathless as he stood at the entrance of the pristine dining room. He squeezed Blue for comfort when Hannibal's hand left his back.

Alana walked in from the kitchen and smiled at Will, "You all ready for some donuts?"

"Sit, sit," Hannibal gestured at the table,"I will return with the beignets, not donuts."

Hannibal disappeared into the kitchen as Alana laughed and waved Will over to her. Keeping Blue defensively in front of him Will approached the pretty doctor. She sat and patted the seat beside her. Will slipped into the seat nervously glancing at her but keeping his eyes downcast.

"Did you sleep well?" She asked.

"Yes, thank you," Will answered softly.

"How do you like Hannibal's place?" Alana pried.

"It's nice…" Will answered slowly. Alana waited for him to elaborate. "Th-the bedroom has windows."

Alana gave him an even bigger smile, "That's wonderful Will. I love having windows in my house. They let in so much light."

Will hummed in agreement not sure what to do next in the interaction. He had never been good at chit chat before, and now, after years in captivity, he had no clue how to respond. Thankfully, Hannibal returned before the silence became awkward.

"Beignets, everyone," Hannibal announced, carrying in a large platter. He placed it before Will and sat at the head of the table right beside Will. With Alana on his other side, Will momentarily felt trapped by the two, but neither seemed intent on attacking him, so he let himself be comforted by their presence.

The platter contained not only the powdery fluffy beignets but an assortment of fruits and jellies along with glasses of orange juice and a sweet smelling pink juice. Will's mouth watered at the sight.

Hannibal served them, selecting food and placing it on smaller plates before giving it to his guests. Will clutched Blue, preventing his hands from grabbing the delicious looking sweets.

Hannibal was saying something about the origins of the food and something about the preservation of the jams, but Will honestly didn't care. As soon as the plate was set before him he grabbed the beignet and shoved the whole donut in his mouth. It was scrumptious. Warm, fluffy, and so utterly sweet. Everything Will dreamed they would taste like.

Will realized halfway through chewing that Hannibal had stopped talking and was looking at him with a raised brow, "Do you like it?"

With his mouth full, he couldn't respond other than to nod frantically. Hannibal grinned and put another on his plate, "Eat as many as you'd like."

Will ducked his head with a blush, but continued chewing the treat. Hannibal and Alana talked over him as he snatched the next powdery round. Everytime his plate was empty, Hannibal would put another beignet on it. Soon, his fingers were covered with powdered sugar and the front of his shirt a mess of white and brown crumbs. His stomach became quickly full and he felt slightly sick. Thankfully, the stack of beignets had dwindled and there were none left for Will to eat.

He rested back in his seat finally sated with enough beignets for a lifetime settling in his stomach.

"Here, Will," Hannibal held out a napkin, an amused smile adorning his face at the sight of Will's powdered sugar covered face. Will hastily wiped his face. Getting most of the white stain except a bit around the corner of his mouth. Hannibal elected to ignore it rather fondly.

"Did you get enough?" Hannibal asked.

Will hiccuped, "Yes, thank you!"

"They were delicious, Hannibal, per usual," Alana chimed in.

"Thank you, Alana," Hannibal turned to Will, "Do they live up to New Orleans beignets?"

Will twisted Blue nervously in his lap, "I-I don't know."

Hannibal's lips seemed to pout, "I suppose I'll have to keep trying."

Will noticed his downturn expression and quickly tried to rectify the situation, "No-no, I didn't mean they didn't. It's just– well, I've never actually eaten a beignet before. I don't know what they taste like."

Hannibal looked puzzled.

"I've only ever saw them on the street. But I'm sure yours are the best, they were delicious!" Will attempted to smooth over his error.

"They're not your favorite food?" Alana asked.

Will gulped. He had told Hannibal they were his favorite, hadn't he? Had he lied to the older man? Will looked worriedly between Hannibal and Alana anxious about the repercussions of being found lying. He tried to cover his tracks quickly, "They're my favorite now."

Will was certain a beating was headed his way, but Hannibal just laughed, "That is a very clever and flattering thing to say, Will."

Will breathed a sigh of relief, but apologized anyway, "I'm sorry for lying sir."

Alana touched him gently on the shoulder, he managed not to jump. "You didn't lie sweetheart. You won't get in trouble for telling us things. You can tell us as much or as little as you want."

"You can say whatever you'd like, Will," Hannibal agreed pointedly.

Will glanced between the two doctors unsure of their motives. "You want me to talk?"

Alana glanced at Hannibal, their eyes seemed to converse before they returned to Will. Alana began slowly, "We want you to be comfortable, Will. You've been through a terrible ordeal. People will want you to tell them what happened. And you should, but you should also have a safe place, where you don't have to talk about any of those things."

"You don't want me to talk?" Will asked confused.

Alana looked at Hannibal for help. Hannibal cleared his throat, "I think what Alana is trying to say is we are not like the dragon," Will stiffened at the name, his eyes wide. Hannibal reached over and took Will's hand squeezing it in his palm. He repeated himself slowly, "We are not like the dragon. We won't force you to do or say anything. "

"You're not like the dragon?" Will repeated skeptically, though he didn't let go of Hannibal's hand.

"You might not believe that right now, Will, but I hope we can prove it to you," Hannibal answered.

"I believe you," Will responded quickly, "But, I guess, I keep getting bad reminders or something."

Alana nodded, "A lot of things can be triggering, Will. But as we learn them, we can confront them so they're not so scary, right?"

Will nodded slowly.

"I don't want my home to be frightening to you," Ha

nnibal added, "I want you to be safe and happy here."

Will smiled a little and shyly said, "I feel safe and happy with you."

Hannibal couldn't stop the grin from growing on his face.

Chapter 11

The rain choked out the light from the stars. It came down heavy in the dark alley. Pounding down on the bright red umbrella.

Freddie walked down the dismal alleyway to her car. Her boots splashing through the puddles as she made her way purposefully towards the vehicle.

A shadow moved from the side of the building. Stalking after the red head.

Freddie glanced behind her and quickened her pace. Her keys jingling as her steps sped through the rain.

The shadow quickened nearing her as she rushed to her car.

Freddie spun around as the figure was almost on top of her, a can of mace raised in defense, "Back off! I've had enough of you!"

The figure paused, removing his rain hood.

Freddie lowered her spray, "Crawford?"

Jack Crawford frowned at the reporter, "Lounds you're a hard woman to find."

Freddie huffed, pocketing her can of mace, "Not hard enough apparently. You're not the first stalker I've had."

"What do you mean?" Jack asked sharply.

Freddie pulled her scarf away from her neck revealing ugly purple hand prints. "Your tooth fairy, or should I say the Great Red Dragon, had some choice words for the FBI."

"Shit," Jack raised a hand a black SUV appeared in the alley. The door opened in front of them, "Get in, Lounds. You're under FBI custody."

"Kidnapping witnesses? Really Crawford," Freddie crossed her arms, "I thought the FBI was more civilized."

"You're wanted for questioning," Jack snapped irritably.

"Whatever, I'm not signing any confidentiality agreements. This is the best story I've ever got." Freddie snapped back as she climbed into the car.

"Save the story." Crawford grumbled as he climbed in, "We've got a killer to catch."

*

The rain woke Will. He shivered and turned towards Blue, cuddling deeper into the warm blankets.

A bolt of lightning flashed outside. The light made Will sit up, as thunder seemed to shake the house. Will whimpered, clutching Blue in a death grip. Storms always scared him. He remembered the terrifying hurricanes that destroyed the gulf. He and his father tried to travel North everytime a storm approached, knowing their tiny tin trailer would flood or wash away. But there were a few times they stuck it out trapped in a metal box as the winds tried to rip it apart.

Will scurried out of the bed and peaked out of his window. The storm was raging, with sheets of rain falling hard against the window panes. The trees were nearly bent in half against the Atlantic winds. Will back away from the fury of the storm.

Will didn't want to go back to sleep. He went to his bedroom door, always opened just a crack, and peered out at Hannibal's door just across the hall.

For the past two days he had stayed in the bedroom, only coaxed out to eat downstairs. Hannibal left him alone, checking on him periodically. Will had heard Hannibal moving around the house, playing on the piano, or even drawing in his study. Will didn't want to bother him but he needed the older man's comforting voice now.

He crossed the hall and knocked on the door softly, somewhere in his mind hoping that Hannibal wouldn't hear. Which was more terrifying, the storm or Hannibal? Will thought they were about equal, but Hannibal at least told him he cared.

Hannibal opened the door a moment later, a house coat tied over his pajamas. "Will?"

Will shifted nervously, hand hands migrating across his chest to clutch his bandaged arms, "It's storming."

Hannibal opened his arms and Will shuffled in. Hannibal hugged him, his hardened body made soft just for Will. "It'll pass soon. Would you like some hot chocolate?"

Will's dark curls ducked as he nodded against Hannibal's shoulder. Will didn't really want hot chocolate, he just wanted to stay in Hannibal's protective embrace. He didn't know how to voice that though, so he just agreed with whatever Hannibal said.

He went downstairs, Hannibal's arm wrapped around his waist, pulling him close to the older man's side.

"Chair or stool?" Hannibal asked when they arrived at the kitchen.

Will glanced between the two. The stool would be closer to Hannibal, "Stool please."

Hannibal left his side and pulled the stool out, ever the gentleman. Will blushed and sat at the counter doing everything in his power to ignore the butterflies in stomach whenever Hannibal smiled at him.

Hannibal poured milk into a sauce pan and began heating it on the stove. Will couldn't help a small laugh from escaping his lips. Hannibal raised an eyebrow at him.

"You can microwave it," Will explained, still giggling slightly.

"Microwave? The microwave is for thawing meats and only in dire circumstances," Hannibal said seriously.

Will scrunched his nose, "I've only had microwaved hot chocolate."

"From a powder?" Hannibal asked.

"Y-yes. Isn't that what hot chocolate is made from?" Will asked, suddenly nervous he'd forgotten how to make hot cocoa.

Hannibal chuckled, "That is one way to make hot chocolate, but I prefer mine with actual chocolate."

He pulled out a tin foiled block, revealing a hunk of solid chocolate. Will's eyes dilated, "That's chocolate?"

"Yes, 98% Columbian dark cocoa. Don't worry, I will add sweetener to your drink." Hannibal replied looking highly amused.

"Is it hollow?" Will reached over the counter and knocked on the brown block before his brain could stop himself. The chocolate did not break nor did it sound hollow. He gasped, "That's so much chocolate!"

"Yes, and as you can see, it is also not powder. Tell me Will, have you had much chocolate?"

Will shook his head, "I got candy on Mardi Gras and sometimes on Halloween if Dad let me go trick or treatin'."

Hannibal nodded as Will spoke. He took out a knife and shaved a piece of the block off and handed it to Will, "Try real chocolate– it'll be slightly bitter."

Will took the piece and tried a small bite. Immediately his features turned sour at the taste. He forced a smile and lied, "It–It's good sir."

Hannibal laughed, "It's a strong taste, especially if you're used to sweet chocolate. Why don't you try this one?"

Hannibal handed him a small square candy. Will reluctantly took the new chocolate, worried it would be bitter like the first. He bit into it tentatively, but this time wonderful creamy sweet flavors overwhelmed his mouth. He moaned around the candy. "Hmmm Hannibal, it's so good!"

Hannibal redirected his eyes away from Will's lips to the task at hand– making hot chocolate. He was determined to recreate Will's delicious moans when he served the hot cocoa. His

hands worked diligently combining ingredients while Will enjoyed the sweet chocolate truffle.

Soon the smell of hot chocolate fragranced the air as Will breathed in deeply the intoxicating dark scents. Hannibal poured out the coco, placing a steaming mug in front of Will. Handing him a silver spoon, "Blow on it first, it's hot."

Will did so with care. He glanced shyly at Hannibal. Licking his lips nervously.

"What is it?" Hannibal asked, instantly.

Will shook his head, "It's nothing."

"Tell me," Hannibal insisted.

"I–" Will paused, he stirred the mug slowly, "Well, I was wondering if you had any marshmallows?"

Hannibal's face fell and Will knew that the man had none. It had been a stupid thing to ask. Now Hannibal was sad. Will had made the kind man upset– how could he? Will tried to comfort him, "That's ok. I don't need 'em. I don't even like marshmallows. They would probably make the cocoa bad. It was stupid to ask. I'm sor–"

"Will, it's never stupid to ask for something you'd like. Marshmallows are a wonderful idea. I just wish I had them in my pantry for you. I'll make sure to have some next time."

"Next time?"

"Next time you'd like coco, but only if you like it. We can try any number of other treats too."

Will couldn't stop the smile from playing across his face. Hannibal made him feel so happy and safe. He covered his joy by sipping the liquid chocolate. It tasted like gold. Will groaned at the taste, he never tasted something so warm and sweet.

Hannibal smiled at Will's sounds attesting to his obvious enjoyment of the drink. He could imagine Will making those groans during *other* activities, but tried to block those images from his mind. He was looking after the boy, wasn't he?

By the time they'd finished their chocolate, the storm was dying down. "Would you like to go to bed now?" Hannibal asked.

Will nervously glance at the stairs. He didn't really want to be alone. The room was nice, and Will felt safe beneath the covers of his bed, but he felt safer near Hannibal. He wanted the man to stay with him, not send him away to his room. But of course he couldn't voice that, it would be far too disrespectful. "I guess," Will whispered.

"We don't have to," Hannibal said encouragingly, "Is there something you'd like to do?"

Will had no idea what Hannibal might be suggesting. If he could list out three things he liked to do over the last two years his favorite was obviously playing with his dogs. The second,

eating as much food as he could find. And the third was probably sleeping alone.

But he didn't want to sleep alone now. Nor did he think he could eat any more food. And Hannibal didn't seem to be one to play pretend dogs. So he just frowned, "I don't know."

"Do you want to watch a movie?"

"No." Will answered adamantly. He remembered all the times Dolarhyde had wanted him to watch a movie. He always ended up trapped between the man's legs choking down his sorid cock. Why would Hannibal want that? How could he ask such a thing? Didn't he say he wasn't like the dragon?

Hannibal's eyes widened slightly and Will knew he had upset the kind man. Hannibal was just waiting for him to make a mistake. A reason to hurt Will. Will couldn't blame the man, he deserved to be punished. He should be good and obey. He immediately tried to fix his mistake, "I mean, yes. I want to watch a movie."

"Will, we can do something else–"

"I want to!" Will frowned stubbornly.

Hannibal raised his hands as if approaching a wild animal. He spoke slowly, "We don't have to, if you don't want to."

Will shook his head. Hannibal was being so confusing. He was so kind. Will didn't want to upset him. The man obviously thought a movie would be good. Maybe if the doctor fucked him everything would be OK? Will swallowed hard; he would do it to please Hannibal. "No, I want to. I want to watch a movie with you."

Hannibal frowned, he could obviously see Will was struggling, but he didn't want to push the boy. "Will, maybe it would be better if we got ready for bed."

"No!" Will shouted visibly upset, "No, I want to watch a movie!"

Hannibal wanted to comfort the boy, but Will was closed off completely. He sighed and conceded somewhat unwillingly, "Alright, why don't you pick one out?"

"You want me to pick?" Will asked, his eyes wide with fear. Dolarhyde's collection of snuff films were regularly perused but never by Will. The responsibility was intimidating.

"Of course, you can. Go sit down, I'll turn the TV on in a moment. Let me clear these dishes."

"I can help!" Will perked up at the aspect of helping, but Hannibal put a firm hand on his shoulder calming him down.

"Maybe tomorrow. Go on now."

Will hesitantly stood. Before he left Hannibal asked, "Do you want popcorn?"

"What?" Will was taken aback. More food? "But we just had hot chocolate?" Will asked confused.

"It'll be a little snack. You don't have to eat it if you're not hungry." Hannibal answered kindly.

"OK," Will answered quietly, once more confused by Hannibal's conflicting tones.

Hannibal ushered him out of the kitchen. Making sure he made it to the living room. He gave Will a large knit blanket hoping the weight of it would calm his nerves. He tucked the boy into the couch, smiling at the way he seemed to melt into its surface.

"There, I'll be back in just a moment, just relax," Hannibal left the room, leaving a scared and not relaxed looking Will wrapped like a burrito on his couch. He quickly cleared the dishes and set a pan on the stove for the popcorn. While it heated he washed the mugs.

He worried about leaving Will alone for too long, but the boy needed space. He had been trying to give him distance over the last two days. He hoped Will would gain more confidence, but instead he seemed to hide in his room. Hannibal tried to present him with as many choices as possible so he would feel like he was in control. But the boy rarely took them, choosing to stay alone. Hannibal was somewhat relieved that Will choose to watch a movie, despite how scared he looked doing so. It meant he was willing to try.

The sound of popcorn popping broke his musings. He quickly finished the snack by topping it with lots of butter and salt. He poured the delicious smelling kernels into a large bowl and carried it to the living room.

"I hope you like your popcorn with lots of butter–"

Hannibal stopped mid sentence. Will was standing naked in his living room. He stood facing Hannibal, his arms crossed tight across his chest while his hands gripped his forearms painfully. The nails digging into his bandaged skin. Will's head was tucked to his chest while his face was hidden by his dark hair.

"Will–"

The boy began to shake. Hannibal dropped the popcorn bowl, not caring about how the kernels spilled across the floor. He rushed to the boy, taking the discarded blanket from the floor and wrapping it around Will's trembling shoulders.

"Baby, where's your clothes?" As soon as he asked, he spotted them folded neatly on the couch. He touched the boy's head, it was cold and sweaty, "Are you hot? Do you want a bath?"

"W-watch a movie?" Will stuttered.

"We watch movies with our clothes on, Will," Hannibal said slowly, "I think we should get you cleaned up."

"No! You wanted to watch a movie! I'll do it. I'll do it OK?"

"You don't have to do anything, Will."

"I know!" Will wailed. He shook off the blanket. And threw himself at Hannibal's feet. He pushed his face into Hannibal's crotch while grabbing Hannibal's hand. He pushed the hand into the back of his head. He looked up at the man, "I don't do it. You do it."

Hannibal's eyes widened in realization. He tried to step back but the boy gripped his arm and hip. He leaned forward and rubbed his face against Hannibal's zipper. His pretty lips parted and he mouthed at Hannibal through his trousers.

Hannibal jerked away, pushing the boy back. Will fell heavily on his back. He looked hurt but simply turned on his stomach, canting his hips up while spreading his legs, "You can take me during the movie. I'll be good. I swear, I'll be good, sir."

"Will, stop this," Hannibal ordered, his voice barely a whisper from heartbreak.

Will cowered but he didn't move from his vulnerable position. Hannibal pulled the discarded blanket over the boy. He wrapped his hands under the Wills armpits and lifted him up. Will went willingly, his body disturbingly pliable in Hannibal's hands.

Hannibal tucked the blanket tightly around the boy as he hugged him closely from behind. "Will, I would never ask that of you."

"I don't understand, I'm being good!" Will wailed.

"Shhhh, you are a good boy," Hannibal tried to hush him.

"We're supposed to watch a movie, fuck me and then be done, and I can go to sleep, please! Please Hannibal!"

Will began fighting in his arms, turning around in his arms so he could claw at the man's chest, desperately wanting the man to do anything.

"Fuck me already," Will begged. His eyes were wild.

"I don't want to watch a movie!" Hannibal grabbed the boy's face making him look him in the eyes, "I don't want to watch a movie or fuck you."

"What?" Will sputtered.

"I don't want to watch a movie." Hannibal repeated.

"B-but you- you said–"

"I know what I said. I changed my mind."

"W-what do you want then?" Will asked wide eyed. Hanging onto every word Hannibal uttered.

Hannibal wanted to give him a warm bath and tuck him in bed, but he didn't want to send Will into another episode by moving him. He looked around and spotted an old leather copy of Dante's Inferno sitting beside the couch. It sparked a thought.

"I want to read to you."

"Read?" Will asked. Totally dumbfounded by the idea.

Hannibal reached over and grabbed the book, "I will read aloud and I need you to listen carefully."

"I will! I can listen!" Will nodded excitedly. He desperately wanted to please the man.

"Shh, I know you can," Hannibal pulled Will on the couch against his chest. He situated him so he lay against his chest and stretch out his legs along the couch.

The blanket covering Will's back had flopped open in the front, revealing Will's entirely too thin torso, his long legs upon the couch, and his flaccid cock resting sensually between his thighs. Hannibal couldn't help but stare. He had seen Will naked. But the young man had always been terrified and curling in on himself. Even now, Hannibal could feel Will's heart thrumming nervously, but his body looked lithe and relaxed for the first time.

A hot wet tongue licked his neck, pulling him from his thoughts. He glanced down at Will, a mess of dark curls as he felt the boy begin to kiss and suck on his neck.

"Will–" he stuttered, which made the boy redouble his efforts, peppering kisses under his chin and along his neck. Teeth grazed his earlobe, making him jerk. He reached up and pulled Will's chin up, the boy was panting slightly, his lips red from their work.

"You distracting boy. No more kisses." Hannibal said softly.

Will frowned, "But you liked it."

"That doesn't make it right," Hannibal explained. He had to remind himself that the boy was an empath. He could read other people's emotions as if they were his own. Hannibal hated that he'd let the boy see his emotions for him. Will was only responding to what Hannibal felt. It was how he survived, Hannibal realized. Will had only lived so long with the dragon because he mirrored exactly what the dragon wanted. Hannibal's lip curled at the thought.

"I'm sorry," Will whimpered.

Hannibal dropped his expression, knowing he scared the young man. He gathered Will tightly in his arms, pulling the blanket over his body. "No, I'm sorry, Mylimasis."

He opened the old book, determined to show nothing but platonic endearment to the young man.

"Let's read a story," He began, "In the Midway in this, our mortal life, I found me in a gloomy wood, astray gone from the direct path."

Will's breathing calmed as Hannibal read canto. He relaxed into Hannibal's side, nestling towards the man. Soon Will's breathing became slow and his fidgeting stopped as the boy drifted to sleep. Hannibal read on for several minutes hoping to guide Will into slumber as Virgil guided Dante into the underworld.

Chapter 12

They called Will in the following morning. Jack said new evidence had risen and he and Hannibal were needed at Quantico.

Hannibal had taken the call, lounging in the corner of the couch with Will still asleep on his chest. He slowly ran his hand through Will's curls. Combing the bird's nest into something that appeared to be hair. Will hummed at his touch and opened his eyes.

"Hannibal?" His voice croaked, still full of sleep.

"Good morning, Will."

Will pulled himself up further. His legs bracketed Hannibal's as he plopped himself down on the older man's lap, seemingly unaware of his state of undress. He tucked himself against Hannibal's warm chest, ducking down to avoid any unnecessary eye-contact and sunlight. Hannibal pulled the blanket around the young man, not liking how the morning light made his bruises appear dark on his pale skin.

"Did you sleep well?" Hannibal mused.

Will yawned sleepily, "Yes. You're very warm."

Hannibal chuckled, rubbing soothing circles at the base of his skull, "You have far too little meat on your bones to keep your body insulated from the temperature. You need to wear warm clothing and eat lots."

Will shifted, pressing closer to Hannibal. He murmured under his breath, "Or I could stay with you."

Hannibal smiled fondly, "Of course, you may cuddle with me as much as you like here, but if we go out, you should be warm on your own."

Will sighed unhappily, his fingers grasping tightly to Hannibal's sweater, but he made no move to argue.

"Speaking of going out, I have some news," Hannibal continued to massage Will's neck lightly, "It seems our vacation has come to an end."

Will jerked up, looking frightened, "You're turning me out?"

"What?" Surprised,Hannibal quickly smoothed over the boy's worries, his hands offering calming touches, "No, darling. You're staying with me."

Will let out a sigh of relief. He was terrified Hannibal would kick him out after last night. He didn't know how to act around the man. He was so sophisticated and intimidating. Will didn't

understand why Hannibal would want him. It was new, being wanted and cared for, he was much more used to being used then tossed aside. It was almost easier that way.

“Crawford has called us to Quantico,” Hannibal explained, “I was hoping he'd leave you out of it, but he's requesting your attendance."

Will did not want to talk to the terrifying burly agent so he put on his best puppy dog eyes. He implored Hannibal, "Can't I stay here? I won't cause any trouble."

Hannibal smiled at him, "I'm afraid the meeting is required."

Will pouted, "But I'm tired." To emphasize this point he collapsed entirely on Hannibal, pushing his whole weight forcibly down on the older man. He nuzzled his face down in Hannibal's neck.

Hannibal grunted at the additional weight and before he could stop him, he felt Will’s lips begin kissing his neck. Hannibal pulled Will up, "No, darling." He guided Will’s face up to his, "I don't need your kisses."

Will cocked his head to the side, "But I'm good."

Hannibal's lips quirked slightly in amusement. The boy was indeed quite good at kissing. "Yes, but I would rather you use your words than your lips."

Will pouted, "You want me to talk?"

Why did everyone want him to speak? He had trained himself for years to be silent. To listen and watch what other people wanted. He was fine being ignored. It had saved him countless times. But speaking? Speaking out never helped. Speaking out only brought more pain.

"You don't have to talk, but instead of trapping me on the couch with your kisses, you could try to tell me what you really want." Hannibal could tell the moment he mentioned Crawford, the boy had frozen, looking for an escape. He wished for Will to voice his fears rather than hide from them.

Will straightened upright though still seated on Hannibal's lap, "What if I want to kiss you?" Will asked stubbornly. They both knew he was avoiding the subject.

Hannibal raised an eyebrow at the obstinate teen, "Then you should ask if you can kiss me."

Will huffed and crossed his arms, "Asking won't do anything."

"How so?"

Will remembered countless times he’d ask his father for things. For food, to stay at a school, for a better place to live, to quit drinking. None of his pleading ever worked. It only aided in his father's drunken fury. And then the dragon. Will had begged him. Pleaded with him to stop, to wait, for a respite. But nothing ever worked. Will would end up on the wrong side of the monster’s fists. Beaten into submission.

"It don't do nothing," Will's Southern dialect slipping through, "It only matters who's stronger than who."

Hannibal frowned at that. The boy clearly believed what he said. Hannibal imagined being tortured by Dolarhyde made the boy consider himself helpless. He tried to boost the younger man's confidence, "You are strong."

Will scoffed, "No, I'm not."

"Yes you are. You are brave and clever. You understand people more than they might know themselves."

Will shook his head, "That's not being strong, that's just surviving."

"Is survival not the greatest strength?"

Will said bitterly, "Not for me."

"Will–"

"I'm just a weak coward," Will stated viciously. He was tired of pretending that he was anything other than what the dragon had made him, "I'm stupid. And I can't do anything right. I'm stupid and bad."

Will struck his chest with the flat of his hand. Hoping the pain would be punishment enough. It stung but it wasn't enough. He raised his hand to strike himself again but Hannibal caught his hand, "No, Will."

Will tried to jerk his wrist from Hannibal's grip but the older man held him tightly.

Will panicked at the way Hannibal held his wrist. Images of the dragon flooding his mind, "Let go of me!" He cried.

Hannibal immediately released Will's hand. Will shuddered and scuttled off Hannibal's lap to the other end of the couch. The blanket was discarded and he was left huddled naked on the cushions.

Hannibal sat up slowly from where he had been lounging, "Will?"

Will glanced at him, disbelief and anger flickering through his face. He bit back a sharp retort, instead choosing to glare at the older man. He thought Hannibal would be different but he was just the same as everyone. Twisting Will into something he wanted.

"I'm sorry, Will. I shouldn't have grabbed you."

Will pulled his knees to his chest. Wrapping his arms protectively around himself.

"Mylimasis, I'm sorry. I just don't want to see you hurt."

Will dropped his gaze. Hannibal was being kind again. He could have hit Will for being so stupid. That's what the dragon would have done, that's what his father would have done, but Hannibal always did kind things even when Will didn't deserve them. Will sighed, "I'm sorry, Hannibal. I shouldn't have yelled."

"No," Hannibal reached over, his fingers guiding Will's gaze back to him, lightly holding his chin, "I'm glad you spoke up. Do you see what your words can do?"

Will struggled to control himself. He had spoken up hadn't he? It worked. His words had been obeyed. His eyes watered, the emotion overwhelming him, "It's just, no one's ever listened before," he gasped as a sob escaped, "I told him to stop so many times. I–I'd scream but it never worked. He–he didn't listen."

Tears streamed down Will's face as he tried to control his breathing.

"Come here Mylimasis."

Will went to Hannibal's awaiting arms. The older man pulled him into a tight embrace stroking his hair as Will cried on his shoulder.

"You deserve to be listened to. If no one else, I will listen, my darling. I will always listen."

*

After Will had calmed down, Hannibal took him upstairs. He helped him into the shower. Only leaving once to grab Will's clothes from the closest. He stayed in the bathroom, scrolling on his phone while he waited for the boy to finish. He kept his gaze away from the boy behind the glass only glancing up to ensure he wasn't panicking or lost in his head. Thankfully Will seemed intent on his washing.

When he finished, Hannibal met him by the shower door with a stack of fluffy towels. Will tied one round his waist while Hannibal gingerly covered Will's back and shoulders with another, quickly surveying Will's scarred flesh for any signs of infection. The antibiotic medicine seemed to be helping and the lacerations seemed to be healing. His bruises were fading from their angry purple to a red.

"May I comb your hair?" Hannibal asked.

"Yeah, but it gets messy no matter what you do with it," Will huffed.

"Have you ever put product in it?"

"Like gel?"

Hannibal nodded, deciding not to explain the complexities and varieties of hair products that couldn't be summed up in just *gel* .

"We never had it. Dad said it costs too much." Will shrugged.

Hannibal was glad Mr. Graham senior was deceased, or else he probably would have murdered the man for the poverty he let his son live through.

“Well, luckily I have some products here that may help. Would you like to try them?”

Will dipped his head shyly, “Ok.”

Hannibal sat Will on the toilet and began combing through his wet hair. Will closed his eyes and leaned into his touch, making Hannibal smile. He messed with Will’s hair for several minutes, massaging the teen’s scalp, before applying a nice amount of mousse. He swept Will’s hair from a messy looking crow’s nest to a decent yet fashionable style.

“There,” Hannibal said as he finished, “What do you think?”

Will stood and went to the mirror already smiling. When he saw his reflection his smile broadened, “Hannibal! It’s never looked like that! It’s-It’s wonderful! Thank you!”

He spun around and jumped into Hannibal’s arms. Will’s arms wrapped around Hannibal’s neck as he hugged the breath out of the older man.

Hannibal chuckled and quickly hugged him back, “You’re welcome, Will. Now let’s get you dressed.”

“Can I kiss you?” Will asked shyly when Hannibal released him.

“What?” Hannibal said, taken aback.

“Y-you said I had to ask, so um, can I kiss you?” Will shifted nervously on his feet, not meeting Hannibal’s eye.

“Why do you want to kiss me?”

“To say thank you for doing my hair,” Will stated immediately.

Hannibal couldn’t help but consider the temptation. Will looked so innocent standing in front of Hannibal practically naked, asking to kiss him.

Hannibal squashed that feeling immediately, “You already said thank you, but I appreciate the thought.”

Will sighed. He felt somewhat relieved his request was denied. He let Hannibal pull a t-shirt over his head and assist him in pulling his underwear and pants up. Clothing still felt unnatural on his body and he appreciated Hannibal’s deft hands in helping him. Shoes were especially hard. Will could pull his socks on, but getting his feet in the tennis shoes Hannibal had given him was more difficult. They felt too tight and confined. When Hannibal managed to get them on, Will scrunched his face tightly and began rocking, trying to cope with the uncomfortable feeling.

“It’s alright, darling, there are some slides you can use downstairs,” Hannibal took the confounding shoes off and put them away. Will let out a sigh of relief. Hannibal led him

quickly out of the room. Making sure to take the stuffed animal on his way out.

Before Will could really process it, he was slipping loose sandals on and being ushered to the garage. Hannibal lured Will into the car with a thermal of hot chocolate and a Tupperware container of beignets. Once Will was buckled in the front seat with a heavy blanket over him and Blue safe in his arms, they set off.

The security outside Hannibal's house trailed faithfully behind them in a dark vehicle. Will didn't notice, and Hannibal was not about to tell him. Will was quiet, choosing to stare out the window. Hannibal left him be. Knowing that the next few hours would be taxing for the young man.

As they approached the complex Will gasped in awe, "That's Quantico?"

The old brownstone buildings housed the FBI, but they were rather unremarkable in architecture. "Yes. Do you like it?"

Will blushed, "Yeah, I always kinda–um, nevermind it–it's stupid."

"What is it?"

Will hesitantly licked his lips, "Well, I kinda always thought the FBI– like detectives and shit, were kind of cool."

Hannibal smiled, "They are a talented force. Adept at catching criminals."

Will was quiet again. His face somber. He couldn't help but question why he hadn't been saved. He begged every night for someone to save him. Prayed to the four walls that locked him inside to open. Why didn't the FBI find him? Did they even look for him?

"Will, we found you," Hannibal's comforting hand found his knee, speaking words as if he could read his mind, "We found you, and you're safe."

Will nodded, tears threatening to spill. Of course. The FBI had sent Hannibal. Will would be forever grateful for him, but a nagging in his head wished they had come three years sooner, but Will knew they were trying their best. And besides Hannibal was more than he'd ever wish for.

They parked in the underground garage and entered the building. Will clung to Hannibal's arm as if it were his lifeline. They walked through the halls of Quantico and up a flight of stairs to a reception area. It was bustling with people coming and going. Conversations leaked from offices and from the milling people, a cacophony of voices. It was overwhelming. He turned into Hannibal, hiding his face from all the people and noise. Hannibal drew him into a hug that allowed Will a moment to process all the stimuli in the safety and darkness of Hannibal's suit jacket. Hannibal held him tightly until a voice spoke directly to him.

"Hannibal? Will?" Alana stood besides them. Her mouth was a thin line full of worry.

"Pardon us, Alana. Perhaps you know a quiet place for Will to sit?"

She nodded in understanding and quickly led them down a hall away from the busy reception room. Hannibal kept his arm around Will, trying to shield him best he could. Will kept his eyes closed trying to focus just on Hannibal. While he carried Blue in one arm, his other hand tightly fisted Hannibal's suit jacket, keeping the older man near.

They finally made it to a quieter waiting room next to Jack Crawford's office. Will practically collapsed on the couch, pulling Hannibal down next to him. Will lost no time curling up on the couch under Hannibal's protective arm.

"We've had a rather distressing night." Hannibal explained as Will nestled closer.

Alana pursed her lips. She couldn't help but worry what kind of codependency Hannibal was developing in the teen.

"Jack wants to meet with us first, then Will. He'll have to wait out here for the meeting."

Will keened softly, "Please don't leave me."

Hannibal shifted the clingy boy so he could look him in the face, "Do you see that door right there, Will?" He pointed to a heavy door two yards from the boy, "I'll will be right on the other side of it. I will come right out after the meeting."

"You're leaving me alone," Will whined.

"No, secretary Harris is right there at her desk," He pointed at a stern looking woman sitting behind her large desk across the reception room, "And Alana and I will be within earshot. You're not alone."

Will didn't like it but there was little he could do other than make himself comfortable on the waiting room couch. Hannibal and Alana left him with quick smiles and went through the door. It swung shut with a thud.

*

"What's this about?" Hannibal asked. Annoyed at having to leave Will outside.

Jack sat behind his desk, looking through a pile of files. "We have a lead," Jack said seriously, "We located Freddie Lounds last night."

Alana and Hannibal quickly took their seats. They all knew Dolarhyde was after the journalist after Will had told his story.

"Was she alright?" Alana asked.

"Dolarhyde found her first, but she's somehow still alive."

"What has she said?" Hannibal asked.

"She's being pretty tight-lipped about the whole thing. She says he jumped her at her apartment and took her to a secluded part of some woods. He strangled her several times. She

has the bruises to prove it. But he didn't kill her."

"Why? There's no reason for him not to. Will said he was infuriated with her. He wanted to kill her," Alana asked.

"He hates the name 'tooth fairy' but that was the FBI's nickname, not necessarily Lound's original idea. And from what Lounds offered, his desires have… *shifted* ," Jack sighed annoyed, "I guess a couple days banned from his murder house and pet made him prioritize."

"What do you mean?" Hannibal asked sharply.

"He wants Will."

"Will?" Alana looked shocked

"He's obsessed with the kid," Jack concluded, "Freddie said he demanded to know where Will was."

"Why does he need him so badly?" Alana wondered.

"Power, sex, control," Jack waved his hand, "Frankly I could care less why. Dolarhyde wants him, so let's give him to him. Set a trap. Bait him to hook."

Hannibal felt his insides curl, "Absolutely not."

Alana jumped in as well, "Will is in no condition to be put in that situation."

"He doesn't need to be in any sort of condition, he just needs to be."

"He can barely stand leaving his room in the house and he hasn't set a foot outside," Hannibal argued.

"Do you want to catch the killer or not?" Jack shot back.

"Bringing Will into this mess will solve nothing," Hannibal fought.

"He's already six feet deep in this mess."

"I don't like what you're implying," Hannibal said darkly.

"If the boy doesn't comply, the FBI will press charges for his murders," Jack concluded.

"You can't do that!" Hannibal stood enraged at the injustice.

"I can and I will," Jack rose to his feet, "He'll answer for his crimes one way or another."

"Both of you sit down," Alana commanded.

Jack begrudgingly sat down, Hannibal followed suit disgusted at the agent.

“Arguing does nothing to solve our problems.” Alana sighed like an unhappy school mistress, “Now, can you please tell me why there’s even a case against Will? Because from my perspective, all I’ve seen is a scared teen trying to hold it together.”

“Yes, why do you insist on attacking an innocent victim?” Hannibal spat vehemently. Alana placed a calming hand over his. She glared at him with a telling, be quiet, look.

“I wouldn’t call him innocent. We have too much evidence to prove otherwise. Dolarhyde filmed everything. Every single murder. Will’s too.”

“He was forced,” Hannibal reasoned.

Jack shook his head. The agent almost looked sad, “The first couple murders could be argued as done under duress, but they change as they go on. Will changes.”

“Of course he did! He was with that monster. It would change anyone.” Hannibal thought of Will’s trembling body, his pleas for him to fuck him. The boy would do anything to please his captor.

Jack raised his hands in defense, “I am not a lawyer. But I am a behavioral analyst, and Will’s behavior is strange to say the least.I think it would be easier for both of you to see for yourselves.”

He turned to his computer, pulling up the video files. He turned the screen to the psychologists, “This is the first… Will is assaulted off screen, Dolarhyde tortures the victim, and then forces Will to kill him.”

Jack played the video. The dark interior of Dolarhyde’s home appeared, a man tied to a chair took up the majority of the screen. There were voices off screen, Hannibal heard Will crying begging for release. He squeezed his fists closed, he reminded himself Will was safe just outside the door.

It seemed to last tortuously long, but finally Will’s pleas were heard and the man let him complete. A thud indicated he fell to the ground. All of Hannibal’s murderous rage was turned on the man who sauntered on screen. The tall monster had a knife, twirling it in hand, before demanding Will kill the man.

Will was pulled on screen, entirely naked for the cameras. He bravely denied the man, throwing the knife he was given away from him. The Dragon punished him, his fist colliding with Will’s face, throwing the boy backwards. The monster kicked Will brutally as he lay immobile on the ground.

Will must have said something, for Dolarhyde stopped and grinned wickedly. He turned back to the prisoner. Marching up to the captive and without preamble snapped the man’s finger.

“Jesus,” Alana whispered beside him, “The torture.”

“His empathy would make this more torturous,” Hannibal agreed, “He’d be feeling everyone’s emotions– the man’s pain, Dolarhydes delight, his confusion. It would be

overwhelming."

The dragon was speaking again, the man's shrieking covered the majority of the conversation. From Dolarhyde's grin, they knew he was winning the conversation. Finally, Will's piercing cries of "Shut up! Shut up!" came through. His voice sounded broken– making Hannibal's heart clinch.

Dolarhyde leaned close to the boy, slipping the knife into Will's hand once more and whispering into his ear. Too softly for the camera to hear.

"He's disassociating." Hannibal noted. The sway of Will's body, the empty gaze of his eyes; Will, his Will, was not present.

This not-Will launched himself at the man. The knife plunged into the man's belly. The man's screams pitched and not-Will slammed the knife into the man's gut over and over again– knocking the man and himself over. It would have been glorious, if Will's eye's weren't dead of their spirit.

Jack paused the video, "The rest of the video is a rape. Your thoughts on duress shown here?"

"Absolutely, there is no question," Alana answered, "He clearly tried to fight back. He suffered his own physical injuries as well as had to watch another's torture before being mentally ambushed."

"His empathy led him to disassociate from himself. He couldn't bear the conflicting voices in his head. I would argue he wasn't even mentally present for the murder," Hannibal added.

Jack nodded, "I agree with you both."

Alana huffed exasperated, "So why–"

"Watch the most recent kill," Jack interrupted. He hit play on the new video file, "The victim was Eric Schoeder. This was only two weeks ago."

The video was completely different. It began with Will's face close to the camera as he adjusted the lenses. He was thinner than in the previous video. His hair was longer as it was presently. He fixed the camera and stood back from it, admiring his work.

"There," Will smiled, "All finished."

He moved out of the shot revealing a man tied to a chair. Will seemed to pay no mind to the man as he struggled against his bindings. Will walked around the man. He was naked except for the raggedy pair of boxers riding low on his hips. His body showed ill signs of abuse: bruises and lashes dark against his skin. Will retrieved a knife from the back table. He spun it in his fingers almost playfully. He returned to the captive and plopped himself down by the man's feet.

The man stared terrified down at the boy who smiled up at him, "Don't worry, it won't be long."

The man tried to speak, but it only came out as a series of grunts against his gag. Will pat the man's knee, "It's ok. You can watch me do my tricks while we wait."

Will's tricks turned out to be him tossing the blade high in the air and attempting to catch the handle before it hit the ground. Hannibal cringed at Will's dangerous game.

"Where's Dolarhyde?" Alana murmured. As if summoned by her words, a door off screen slammed open, making Will jump up.

"Great Dragon!" Will shouted with excitement bounding off screen.

There was a low conversation and then Dolarhyde appeared. Walking across the room to check on the captive, Will followed right at his heels looking– dare Hannibal believe it– happy?

"Look– Great Dragon, I set it up just like you want it!" Will pointed at the camera, his face a glow, "And-and I cleaned the knives– this one especially."

The dragon turned from the prisoner to inspect the knife Will held proudly out. Dolarhyde took the knife holding it up to the light. "You got the rust out," he noted.

Will nodded the grin on his face the widest Hannibal had seen, "It took me forever but I wanted to do it for you."

The dragon growled and Will was yanked into the monster's arms. His mouth was savaged by Dolarhyde without prelude. The man bit and sucked at the boy's lips. When Will's face was finally released to breath, he looked scared but a small tentative smile graced his face. He whispered a barely audible, "Thank you."

"Little one," The dragon commanded, his face inches from the boy's, "Make it bloody for me."

Hannibal studied Will's pixelated expression. It looked terribly sad and frightened, but then a smile grew. Forced at first, as Dolarhyde grinned manically down, but then turned genuine. A crazed grin like a cheshire cat gone wild. Hannibal watched with rapt attention as his sweet Will became something other.

Dolarhyde held up the knife. Will grasped it purposefully. He turned to their prisoner and without warning he struck the man across the face with the knife.

Alana gasped beside him.

The man screamed as blood gushed from under his eye and across his nose. Will didn't seem to notice as he turned back to the dragon, holding out the blade for him to see. It was dripping with the hot liquid. "Is that ok? The face bleeds the most."

The dragon groaned. His hands migrating down to his waist band, shoving his hand down his pants as he began to jerk himself off.

“Why are you still clothed?” Dolarhyde barked. Will stripped his shorts as fast as he could. Standing naked and pale as the dragon took his fill of the body before him.

“Make it splatter on you.”

Will didn’t waste a moment, turning toward the captive and slicing across his jugular. The artery seemed to explode with red. It sprayed across Will’s skin, coating him in a sheen of blood.

Hannibal’s breath caught at the sight. It would be beautiful if he knew it came from Will’s own passion. His own rage. If he knew the boy razed the man to the ground as if he was god. But Hannibal knew it was all Dolarhyde’s desire. Will was just a puppet on his string. Entertaining him as he passively obeyed every instruction.

It pained Hannibal to see Will turn to Dolarhyde for approval. His gaze sought praise and acceptance in the monster’s eyes. Will’s attentive eye reading if he had done well. Dolarhyde ordered him to come. Pushing the boy to his knees when he neared. He grasped the boy’s hair harshly, guiding his face to the place the monster wanted him.

Jack stopped the video. There was tense silence around the office. Jack cleared his throat. Turning the screen away from the doctors, “He rapes him again, while Will rather enthusiastically gives him head.”

“You can’t seriously be implying he gave his consent?” Hannibal hissed.

“No. But there are differences. Differences any jury and lawyer can see.”

“The only difference from the first and second video was the development of Stockholm Syndrome in an empath. He had no one else to read off of. His own person was lost in the domineering presence of Dolarhyde. His life was dictated by a mad killer. It would make anyone appear mad.”

“Perhaps,” Jack replied coolly, “Dr. Bloom, your thoughts?”

“Yes, Alana, please speak some sense,” Hannibal shot Crawford a dark look.

Alana held her hand up for Hannibal to stop. She answered slowly, “I don’t know.”

Hannibal frowned, “Alana, clearly you can see this is Stockholm?”

Alana raised her hand for his patience, “It would appear Will has a fascination for the man. He barely looked at Mr. Schoeder, I can’t even say if he saw him as a person. Will’s whole world revolved around keeping Dolarhyde pleased– I’d say yes, he changed his behavior to match the dragon’s desires. That would fall under Stockholm Syndrome. But, Hannibal,” Alana turned to him, “He killed a man without hesitation. He didn’t falter and he didn’t disassociate. It was frankly premeditated.”

Alana gave Crawford a hardened look, “That doesn’t mean he should be convicted,” She glanced over to Hannibal, softening slightly, “But he’s probably more psychologically damaged than he’s letting on. I also think we are all missing something.”

“What?” Hannibal couldn’t keep the bitterness out of his voice. He had wanted the experienced doctor to convince Crawford he was mistaken, but she didn’t. In fact she highlighted Will’s faults.

“Unbiased opinion.”

“You are too close to Will right now to see him as anything other than a victim and you,” She turned to Jack, “have only seen his carnage. I myself would lean towards his innocence, while your lawyers argue for a sentence.”

Hannibal knew she was right. He cared for Will more than he’d like to admit. So much so it clouded his vision. He felt it necessary to protect the boy from any attack.

“What do you suggest we do, Dr. Bloom?” Crawford prompted.

“If the FBI lawyers are hounding him then we’ll have to enlist Will’s help for his own good. But from what I’ve seen today– we proceed with extreme caution. What if something triggers him? What if he gets scared and lashes out? We cannot have a blood bath on our hands.”

Jack nodded, “No knives for WIll.” He said sarcastically.

Hannibal said nothing. He was still furious at Jack, and felt betrayed by Alana. He hated resigning Will into the FBI hands, but there was no other option to keep him safe.

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Will nervously shifted on the uncomfortable leather couch. The secretary raised her eyes to glare at him from above her glasses.

Will shuddered and tried to remain still. People kept coming in and out of the office reception. Will did his best to ignore them and focus on staying still and silent. He squeezed Blue and glanced at the wood door Hannibal had disappeared through. He wished the older man would hurry up.

Suddenly, a weight dipped on the couch. He jumped slightly as a new person sat beside him. The slim woman smiled shrewdly at him. Her brilliant red hair framed her face like a flame. "Will Graham?"

Will shrunk from her, pulling Blue close. Secretary Harris was typing on the computer and seemed to be ignoring the two.

"Freddie Lounds. It's nice to meet you Mr. Graham. Or should I call you Will?"

Will gaped at her not knowing how to respond. Freddie plowed on, "You're just like he described you."

"Wh-What?" Will managed to ask.

"Big baby blues. Dark curls. Bruises easy. Wicked with a knife. The perfect little dragon."

Will gasped, his vision seemed to tunnel as the panic rose in his chest. "Y-you know the dragon?"

"Met him yesterday. Nasty guy if you ask me."

"The dragon?" Will asked. His heart raced in terror.

"Yup, we've got matching bruises and everything," she pulled her scarf off. Finger shaped bruises circled her slim neck. Will self consciously touched his own neck where the dragon's hands had made matching injuries.

Freddie grinned at the boy's reaction, "Nasty huh? But enough about the dragon. I want to know about you, Will. What are you doing here? Shouldn't a murderer be in prison?"

"I-I–," Will struggled to find the right words, "I'm with Hannibal."

"Hannibal? As in Doctor Lecter, the rich socialite parading around with the FBI? Interesting. Still doesn't explain why you're not locked up."

"I'm a good boy," Will whispered. Trying to remember what Hannibal had told him. He wasn't bad. Was he?

"You're good at killing people," Freddie corrected, "Twenty-two dead bodies, right?"

Will shook his head, but confessed, tears already brimming his eyes, "I didn't mean to!"

"Is that why you killed again and again? You didn't *mean* to?"

"No! I didn't! I didn't want to! I swear!" Will cried.

"It doesn't matter if you didn't want to, Will," Freddie sneered, "they're still dead aren't they? And you killed them."

He felt pinned to the couch with no escape from her attacks.

"You know they had families? You think they're going to feel better now that they know you didn't want to? Didn't mean to stab their loved one to death? Oh, he didn't want to, so it suddenly makes it ok? You're a murderer. You should be locked up."

The tears were pouring down Will's face. He choked on his sobs, "I know– I'm sorry!"

"Say it. You need to confess, and I'll tell everyone how sorry you are."

"I–I'm bad – B-but I didn't! I didn't mean to!"

"Say you're a murderer, Will. You know it's true," Freddie insisted.

He felt like his whole world was spiraling. He squeezed his eyes shut to block out Freddie's torrent of words, but they still came and flooded his mind.

He tried to cling to what Hannibal had told him: he was good. But Hannibal didn't know about the terrible things he did. He didn't see the ghosts that haunted Will's waking nightmares. He didn't know the bodies that trailed after him. He didn't see the ocean of blood rising around him.

He was a monster. He should be locked up and torn to shreds. He was a foul, evil creature. A dragon. A dragon to be slayed by knights like in the story books.

When the knights came, he'd lay his head down. When they pierced his flesh, he wouldn't fight back. When they raised their swords, they would see neither tooth or claw from him.

He would take what he deserved, and speak the truth.

“I’m a murderer.”

Chapter 13

Hannibal emerged from the office in a foul mood. Jack insisted they use Will as bait. It was an insane and stupid plan. They had Dolarhyde's face, all his records. If they waited long enough, they would surely flush him out. But no. Crawford was forcing Will into a terrible and dangerous position. Baiting the dragon would only lead to complications and casualties.

Hannibal didn't want to put Will through that emotional and physical danger. But the other option placed Will in prison or an institution. Because despite the circumstances surrounding Will's murders, the FBI lawyers would convict him. Will's sometimes childlike disposition would make him a target for predictors in the system. Hannibal wouldn't allow another person to touch Will. Will could not be convicted. It seemed there was only one option: dangle Will in front of Dolarhyde.

Will's sobs broke his thoughts.

Will was curled on the couch. His face buried in the leather seat as he cried hysterically.

"Will!" Hannibal rushed to him. Gathering the boy in his arms. Will must have realized it was him, because he quickly latched onto the older man, sobbing on the older man's shoulder. Hannibal looked around the room. Alana stood a few feet away looking utterly shocked. Jack was ignoring the sobbing teen speaking to his secretary. The only other person who seemed to be engaged in the scene was a flaming haired woman standing across the waiting room. She was smiling at Will's tears. Hannibal wanted to gut her where she stood.

"What is this?" Hannibal snarled at her.

The woman walked up to the group, "Will? I think he just realized some things about himself."

"Ms. Lounds," Alana stepped between the woman and pair on the couch, "Will is not in a state to handle your presence. Please go take a seat."

"Fine. But I wouldn't hold him too close, Dr. Lecter. People might talk," Freddie grinned and with a wink turned away.

"What happened, Mylimasis?" Hannibal asked softly, petting Will's hair.

Will sniffled but managed to murmur, "I'm a murderer. A murderer!"

"No darling," Hannibal pulled him closer, "You killed to survive. That makes you strong. You are not a murderer."

"You sure you wanna be telling the kid lies?" Freddie sneered over her shoulder.

"Jack!" Alana snapped, "Can we get her removed?"

Crawford turned from his conversation with secretary Harris, glancing at the devolving situation. He waved at Freddie, "Ms. Lounds if you could wait in the conference room. An agent will be with you momentarily."

Freddie grumbled, "Fine."

She turned and flounced to the conference room with a security agent hot on her heels.

"What was that Jack?" Alana angrily questioned.

"What?" Jack responded defensively.

"Why was she here with Will? They shouldn't have been together."

"She is a part of the investigation." Jack stated, not meeting Alana's eyes. He looked at Hannibal, "When he's ready, bring him to my office."

Jack left, retreating to his office.

"What the hell, Jack–" Alana began, but the door closed on her face. "What the actual fuck."

Hannibal fumed. He wanted to strangle the reporter and bludgeon the director. But he had to calm Will down first.

"Will?" Hannibal tried to speak to the boy.

Will burrow himself deeper in Hannibal's chest.

Alana sat beside them on the couch. She tentatively rubbed Will's back, "It's okay, sweetheart."

"They're gone now," Hannibal said calmly.

Will whimpered, but peeked up at Hannibal his face streaked with tears and nose runny from crying.

"There's my brave boy," Hannibal smiled at Will. Still gently petting his head. He glanced up at Alana and nodded towards a box of tissues on the desk, "Alana would you mind?"

She quickly got up and grabbed them. She hurried back to Hannibal.

"Let's get you cleaned up," Hannibal began cleaning the boy's face, but Will's tears didn't seem to stop flowing.

"Will, darling, why are you crying?" Hannibal asked gently.

"I'm a monster, Hannibal."

"Nonsense. You are not a monster. You're just a boy."

Will shook his head, "I killed all those people. They– they had families. They had lives. I butchered them, Hannibal!"

Will's voice became frantic and Hannibal hushed him, drawing him into a tight embrace. He wanted to tell the boy the people he killed were probably pigs deserving slaughter. That not many actually deserved life, but the boy wasn't ready for that lesson. Nor could he share it with Alana listening.

Hannibal spoke softly but authoritatively into the boy's curls, "They will be mourned and they will be missed, but I will mourn the boy who had to fight to live. Doesn't he deserve to live? Doesn't he get a chance at life?"

Will sniffled, "What do you mean?"

"You, Will. You deserve to live."

"No, Hannibal, I'm a monster. I killed those people just like he told me to!"

"He tortured you, Will" Hannibal reasoned, "You had no choice. What would he have done if you didn't kill them?"

Will dropped his eyes, "Beat me."

"And what would he have done if you hadn't changed for him? If you didn't become his perfect little dragon?"

Will shook his head refusing to answer.

"He would have killed you, Will."

"I wish he had," Will whispered.

"No," Hannibal forced Will to meet his eye, "No, Mylimasis. You do not say that."

Will stared fearfully at the forcefulness of Hannibal's words.

Hannibal continued, seeing Will's vulnerability in his eyes. "You deserve to live. I don't care if you've killed as long as you survive. Because what matters is that you're alive. You survived and you keep surviving."

"You really think that?" Will asked. His eyes were blown wide.

"With every breath in my lungs, Will. You're such a brave and brilliant boy."

"Hannibal, all those people– their families. They'll hate me," Will whimpered, "They'll want me punished. Aren't they right? I have to pay for what I did."

"You've paid enough."

"No, I didn't. I'm alive while they're dead!"

"Will, you're feeling guilt," Alana explained, "Because you're empathetic, these feelings are stronger than most people's. You can understand someone's hurt and loss like your own."

"It hurts."

"I know sweetheart," Alana rubbed Will's shoulder, "but guilt does nothing but eat you up inside. You have to learn to live on."

"How do I?"

"Some people just need time to find peace. Some people write everything they feel down. Some people take actions to try to remedy their guilt, like giving back to the community or changing the way they live," Alana's eyes flickered up to Hannibal's then back to Will, "Do you think you might want to do something that helps the families?"

"Alana–" Hannibal warned.

"Yes!" Will answered immediately, "I'll do anything. I want to help!"

Alana continued, not meeting Hannibal's eyes, "Crawford has a plan. He wants you to help catch Dolarhyde."

Will paled, "I–I can't– I don't–"

"Shh, darling," Hannibal pulled Will closer. He wrapped his arms protectively around Will, "I won't let anything happen to you."

Will took a breath, "Ok."

*

Will clung to Hannibal's hand as he was led into the dark office. Jack Crawford sat behind his desk like a haunting monster looming over his fate.

Hannibal led him to a seat. Will wanted to crawl into Hannibal's lap, but he willed himself to be strong and sat down on the stiff chair. Hannibal thankfully sat right next to him. His hand never left Will's.

"Have they told you Will?" Crawford asked.

Will nodded, "Yes sir, you want me to help catch Dolarhyde."

"Yes. In exchange for your assistance, the FBI has agreed to drop all charges against you."

"Oh," Will swallowed. He hadn't known there were charges against him, "Ok. Thank you sir."

"You have to do exactly what we tell you."

"Yes, sir."

"We won't put you directly in harm's way. There will always be a security detail around."

Will swallowed hard. He had seen Dolarhyde in action. He felt the man was unstoppable. Could any security keep him safe?

"Tell him the plan," Hannibal cut to the point.

"We need to get your name publicized. National television, newspapers, everything. Everyone is going to want to know who you are."

"Me?" Will's chest felt tight. It was hard to breathe.

"Yes, but we'll keep your location a secret. People will talk, rumors will spread. We want that, once we have his attention, Freddie Lounds will intentionally leak your location."

"You're going to tell him where I am?" Will felt the panic rise.

The Dragon would find him.

He could imagine it. Sitting with Hannibal in the kitchen.Hannibal would have made him some scrumptious food. Hannibal would be smiling at him, and Will's stomach would be full of those excited butterflies– when suddenly the window would explode. The Dragon would emerge from thin air. Hannibal would stand. He'd try to push Will away. But the Dragon would draw his weapon. He'd aim it at Hannibal's face. The shot would deafen Will, there'd be blood everywhere. On his face, on his hands–

"Will. Breathe," Hannibal's voice broke his thoughts. His hand squeezed Will's.

Will took a stunted breath, coming back to the dim office, "Wh-What if he hurts someone?" Will diverted his eyes. He couldn't speak his fears out loud: *What if he kills Hannibal?*

Jack sighed long-sufferingly, "Like I said Will, there will be heavy security."

Will bit his lip. How could he explain? They didn't understand the danger. Anything could happen!

"What if we're eating? And they're eating? What if no one is watching? Dad said he'd watch but he fell asleep! What if they fall asleep? Dad fell asleep and the dragon got him. I couldn't wake him up and now he's dead! He's dead! What if–"

"Will," Hannibal took Will's other hand, shifting the frightened and panicking boy to look at him, "No one is going to fall asleep while they're working. They will go in shifts. They won't get tired or hungry. They are trained agents. They can look after you and themselves."

"B-but the Dragon will know!"

"Dolarhyde will only know what we want him to know," Crawford said, "We will only leak a singular location. And you will only go to the specified point at certain times."

"You want him to come find me," Will whispered, the realization suddenly dawning on him.

"Yes," Crawford shifted uncomfortably, "If he comes for you, then we'll catch him."

"When he comes," Will corrected softly. He knew the Dragon. The monster would never let him go. He loved Will in his own twisted sick way. He'd come for his prize, his little dragon.

Crawford cleared his throat, "Yes, when he comes we'll surprise him."

"So, he'll come to Hannibal's house?" Will asked tentatively. He was already mapping out all the hiding places in the huge house. Surely he could find somewhere safe.

Hannibal surprised him by answering, "No, of course not, Will. It'll be a secondary location. Perhaps a workplace or a doctor's office."

"Oh," Will's face flushed embarrassed by the way his heart leaped as he heard Hannibal's house would still be safe. Unknown to the monster.

"All you have to do is go to the location as scheduled. When Dolarhyde shows up, we'll have him." Hannibal assured him.

"Can you do that Will?" Crawford asked.

Will nodded, "I'll try sir."

*

Will was so happy to leave Quantico. It was nothing like how he'd imagined it. He thought it would make him feel safe and happy, but all it did was fill him with dread.

Will hated the plan. No one, not even Hannibal seemed to understand how dangerous the Dragon was. He saw agents in the halls with guns– but had they ever seen the Dragon with a gun? When the monster aimed to kill, he killed. Were any of the agents really prepared for that?

Hannibal held his hand all the way to the parking garage. Will felt numb from everything. His head ached from everything. He didn't speak, he didn't think he could speak. He just climbed into the front seat and waited for Hannibal to join him.

"Will, are you alright?" Hannibal asked once he was seated.

Will didn't know how to answer, nor did he want to answer. It was rude of him, but he turned away from Hannibal, pressing his face to the cool window glass.

Hannibal didn't question him again. He turned on the car and drove home. The drive was long and silent. They got back around dinner time, but Will didn't want food. He just wanted to hide away by himself.

"May I go to bed, Hannibal?" Will whispered hoarsely. The first words out of his mouth since the office.

“Of course darling,” Hannibal agreed, though concern was evident on his face, “Would you like me to bring you up some supper?”

Will shook his head, “No, thank you sir. I think I’ll just sleep.”

Will could feel Hannibal’s eyes on him as he trekked up the stairs to his room. As soon as he reached the room, he shed his bothersome clothes and crawled into bed with just his boxers. He felt tears forming in his eyes, but blinked them away.

You’re being childish. Will’s mind growled. *What would the Dragon think? You hiding up here crying?*

Will hurriedly rubbed the tears from his eyes, forcing himself to calm down. If the dragon was coming for him, he wouldn’t want Will to cry. Well, that wasn’t exactly true, he’d want him to scream and cry, but only when *he* was there.

Will forced his mind off. Trying to imagine the green fields where he played with Winston, Buster, and now Blue. He closed his eyes, drifting off to dogs barking all around him. Fresh air, sun, and wagging tails delighted at their play. He let himself be pulled to his imaginary world.

Chapter 14

The dragon was cleaning his gun. The pieces laid out across the table.

Will sat patiently at the kitchen table, waiting, hopeful for his dinner. He glanced at the cabinet where he knew Dolarhyde kept the food. He wasn't supposed to touch the cabinets. He wasn't supposed to open them. Wasn't supposed to think about them, much less look at them.

The dragon sighed exasperatedly, "If you keep that up, you'll never eat."

Will tore his gaze away from the hidden food back to the dragon. The man wasn't looking at him, his focus on his gun. He carefully dusted each piece. Oiling and shining each metal part.

While Will perched at the edge of his seat, the Dragon was casually kicked back. His feet resting up on another chair.

"Sorry," Will murmured. He quickly took his own rag. There was another disassembled gun sitting in front of him. He carefully selected the bolt and began polishing it the best he could.

"You need to learn how to care for the guns," Dolarhyde finished polishing the gun and began to assemble it with frightening speed.

"Yes, Great Dragon," Will agreed, "Thank you for teaching me."

"This will be your job from now on. You understand?" The dragon slid the magazine clip into the gun. He pointed it at Will. Will froze under the trained muzzle of the gun. The Dragon laughed at the sheer fear in his eyes. "Look at you little one. You're shaking too much. Put the gun together."

Will dropped his rag and grabbed the pieces of the gun. His hands were shaking so bad he could barely slide the pieces into place. Sweat beaded at his brow but he kept trying. Finally he got them to click together. He placed the finished firearm down in front of the dragon.

The monster grinned, "Good boy, now come with me I have a surprise for you."

Dolarhyde stood waving his gun for Will to follow. Will stood, sad to be leaving the kitchen, but wanting to please the Dragon. He followed out through the living to behind the white sheet. There was a man slumped in the chair.

Will looked questioningly at the Dragon, "Great Dragon, is it a full moon?"

The dragon laughed, "No, Will. I wanted you to have extra practice today."

The monster strolled over to the man, his head tipped all the down to his chest. The monster grabbed his head and wrenched the man's face up.

Will gasped, “Hannibal?!”

His savior was unconscious. His sandy hair fell skewed over his brow. There were dark bruises covering his face.

"Hannibal!" Will shrieked, but the older man didn't wake up. Will rushed to him, hoping to feel his breath, to touch his pulse, anything to ensure that he was still alive.

But his arm was arrested and his body was lurched to a stop, by the domineering man grinning down at him. "Will, Will, Will," the man snarled, shaking his head, "You know this man? This Hannibal?"

"Please! Please great dragon, let him go!" Will begged. He tried to pull away from the dragon, but the man yanked him closer and hit him across the face, making his ears ring. He stopped struggling.

"Stop whining, you bitch. He's just target practice." He pulled Will away from Hannibal. He dragged Will to behind the couch, bracketing him against the couch from behind. Will was trapped, the dragon hot against his back.

Is he going to have me here? Will wondered. He didn't want Hannibal to see that. But the dragon didn't try to take his clothes off, nor did his hands creep to Will's nether parts.

Instead Dolarhyde forced the gun into his hands.

No.

He couldn't mean that.

He couldn't.

"Shoot him, little one," The dragon ordered.

"No!" Will tried to buck the man away, but he was an immovable force.

Will tried to throw the gun from his hand, but the dragon's hand covered his own. Will couldn't release the gun. The dragon's fingers forced his over the trigger.

"No!" Will shrieked, "Stop!"

"Kill him Will!"

"No! I don't want to!"

The dragon held Will's hand fast against the gun, forcing his fingers over the trigger. The gun was raised– pointed at Hannibal's slumped head. Dolarhyde squeezed the boy's finger down on the trigger.

The gun fired.

The bullet seemed to travel in slow motion. Through the air to the unconscious man.

Will felt himself screaming as the bullet split the man's skull apart. Brain and blood exploding from the back of his head.

Hannibal was dead.

*

Will stumbled blindly out of bed. The room was dark and his window offered no light. He managed to find the door and fling it open. Rushing across the hall, he burst into Hannibal's room.

Hannibal was sitting in bed reading a book. He looked up, surprised, "Will?"

Will ran to him. Hannibal had enough time to drop his book before he was tackled by the smaller body. Will buried his head in the crook of Hannibal's neck. His whole body radiating with intense panic. He wormed closer and clung as tightly as he could to the older man.

Hannibal's arms wrapped around him, instantly protective and calming at the same time.

"You're safe Mylimasis. Tu esi saugus. Niekas tau nepakenks. Aš esu čia. I'm here, Will." Hannibal whispered to his ear.

Will fought to calm his breath. He was panicked from the dream, and the physical exertion of running to Hannibal was not helping his cause. He dug his fingers into the older man, refusing to release his grip.

Hannibal made no sign it hurt, instead he tightened his own embrace, squeezing Will in his protective arms. If his words failed to calm the boy, he'd let his body.

"Hannibal?" Will keened, finally able to speak.

"I'm here mylimasis. We are safe."

"You're alive? I'm not imagining this?" Will asked desperately.

"My heart is beating and my lungs have air. I'm alive, Will."

Will seemed to breathe easier, the tension lessening in his shoulders.

"What happened, Mylimasis?" Hannibal asked gently.

"I think I had a bad dream."

"It frightened you?"

"Yes."

Hannibal rubbed the boy’s back, smoothing circles, "Speaking your fears often gives us courage to face them. Why don't you tell me what happened?"

Will shook his head. Refusing to look at Hannibal. Hannibal sighed, and holding Will close, he rolled them over. Placing Will on the soft pillows so he could look him down in his eyes. Will's hair haloed around his face, his skin pale and his eyes wide and frightened. Hannibal's body lay beside Will's, he propped himself up with his elbow, his other hand carding through Will's hair.

"Tell me," Hannibal asked again.

"We were cleaning his guns," Will blurted out, "He always made me brush and polish all his weapons. It would take hours, Hannibal, hours And then he would check everything and–and if I made a single mistake I’d be punished."

"And you were remembering this in your dream?"

"It felt like a memory, but it changed. Hannibal, I don't know where it went wrong! It went so wrong!"

"Shh, darling. Don't distress yourself. It's not real. You just imagined it in that terribly large brain of yours. Tell me what was wrong."

"It was horrible Hannibal! You were there! In the kill room. The dragon had you all tied up and your eyes weren't open and your head was limp, and he wouldn't let me check if you were breathing or not!" Will's pitch rose as he explained.

"Will darling you need to calm down, it was just a dream remember?"

"But he got you!" Will cried, "And-and I killed you!

Hannibal paused, taking in this information, "You killed me?"

Will wailed and hid his face in his hands, "I killed you! I killed you! He made me kill you!"

"Will, you need to breathe. You obviously didn't kill me because I'm right here, yes?"

"B-but in my dream– I shot you!"

"Yes, in your dream." Hannibal smiled, "You must have good aim."

"But Hannibal, I killed you!" Will cried, his brow furrowing in confusion at Hannibal's lighthearted response.

"Tell me, did you want to kill me?" Hannibal asked.

"No!" Will insisted, "He forced me to push the trigger!"

"Then you didn't kill me, Dolarhyde did. No," Hannibal put a finger to the boy's lip as he tried to argue again, "No, more insisting you killed me."

Will was quiet. Staring up at the older man in awe and confusion. Hannibal started the calming strokes through the boy's hair again.

"Will, what scared you in the dream?" Hannibal asked softly.

"Killing y–"

"No, darling," Hannibal interrupted.

"But I–"

"I don't believe you are afraid of killing me. Killing is just an action. It's nothing to be ashamed of."

Will frowned, "You don't know that."

"I do," Hannibal responded.

Will scoffed softly, "I know it's more than an action. I'm the one who's killed!"

Hannibal raised an eyebrow, "The only one?"

Will's eyes flickered back and forth between Hannibal's, searching. He answered slowly, "No. You've killed too, so you know."

Hannibal nodded, "Yes. What does this tell you?"

Will swallowed, "Either your fucked up in the head or I am. Because killing is wrong! It's shameful!"

Hannibal laughed, breaking the tension, "Will, you are delightful."

Will scowled at Hannibal. He wished the man would get to his point so they could go back to sleep, cuddled in each other's arms. Will really wanted to sleep curled under Hannibal's arm. Safe and happy arm from his dreams. Hannibal's fingers traced across his face, pulling him back to the moment.

"I believe myself to be of right mind, not fucked up as you so elegantly put it. So I'll tell you what's wrong with yours."

Will huffed at that, but he could tell by the way Hannibal's eyes danced he was being playful.

"You Will Graham, are not afraid of killing, but being forced to kill."

It was Will's turn to raise a brow, "What's the difference?"

"Everything darling. All you've known is coercion. Being forced to kill, when it should be a willful expression of your soul."

“What?” Will looked surprised, "You're describing killing like it's beautiful."

Hannibal smiled, "It is beautiful, Will. When it comes from a true desire. From here," Hannibal tapped Will's chest.

"You don't think killing people is wrong?"

"God kills all the time. Are we not made in his image?"

"God?" Will stared up at him, still bewildered.

"We are gods of our own destinies. If a god kills, it doesn't make it wrong. They are justified in their own right.”

“No one has the right, Hannibal,” Will said softly, though he sounded uncertain.

“Think of it this way. A lion kills a lamb. Is it wrong? No. It is in the lion's nature to kill and eat. You cannot blame a lion for doing as a lion should.”

“I'm a lion? A god? What makes me any different from– from– him." Will couldn't say his name.

"You are not Dolarhyde. You can be what you desire now. You're free from him. The dragon told you what you were. Demanded it. Forced it. But you can choose now. Will, the lion can lay down with the lamb or will he can choose vengeance. Choose to live as he ought. Not a caged version of himself but wild and free– A god amongst men.

"But isn't it wrong to murder people?"

"No darling. It's not wrong if you will it to happen."

"I don't know Hannibal."

Hannibal leaned down and kissed Will's forehead, "You don't have to know right now, baby."

Will was silent for a while taking in his thoughts. Then he spoke so quietly Hannibal could barely hear him, "I don't feel like a god."

Hannibal pulled Will against his chest and wrapped his arm around the boy's waist. Will was tucked against Hannibal's strong body. He spoke a promise onto Will’s mess of curls, "I shall endeavor to worship you as one."

*

Will woke in Hannibal's arms. He must have turned in the night, for his face was pressed against Hannibal's night shirt.

Hannibal was running his fingers through Wills curls.

"You're awake." Hannibal's low voice called. Will looked up. Hannibal was looking down at him. There was so much care and fondness in his eyes, Will felt overwhelmed and ducked his face back down. He felt Hannibal pressing kisses to the top of his head.

"Are you hungry?"

Will perked up immediately. He hadn't eaten since yesterday afternoon and felt starved, "Yes, please!"

Hannibal swung his legs off the bed, standing and walking to the closet. Will looked around the room. Taking in his surroundings for the first time. The room was daunting to say the least. Deep maroon walls complemented with dark oak furniture. There was a whole living room set up in front of a massive fireplace. Ornate rugs covered the space, but did nothing to make the room feel cozy. It felt more like a fortress with Will safe in the middle of it. It was dark and brooding, but safe all the same, just like the room's owner.

Hannibal returned to the bed already somehow dressed. He handed Will a bath robe, "Here, wear this for breakfast."

Will blushed realizing his state of undress. Clothes still felt odd to him but he could sense other people's discomfort at his bare skin. It was the decorum of society that forced him to follow the unwritten codes of dress. Will slipped on the soft robe. It was big on him, but it smelled like Hannibal. He wrapped it tightly around himself, it was like his very own hug from Hannibal.

Hannibal held out his hand, helping Will from the bed and leading him downstairs. The sun was shining brightly through the windows.

"Why don't we have breakfast outside on the veranda?"

Will's insides curled as he froze.

He couldn't go outside. That wasn't allowed. He unconsciously rubbed his ankle with his foot,feeling the raw skin where the shackle had lied. He feared it even though it was gone.

"Will?" Hannibal broke his thoughts, "Are you alright?"

Will nodded. He was fine, he could get through this. Maybe it was a test? To see how he'd obey?

"Yes, Si– Hannibal."

Hannibal frowned as he pulled a loaf of bread from the pantry. He didn’t comment on it though and proceeded to slice the bread. “We shall have some light toast and refreshing cuts of fruit. It’ll go well with the morning breeze, yes?”

Will just nodded, coming to sit on one of the stools at the counter to watch Hannibal as he prepared breakfast. Hannibal let him sample all the fruits he cut, to find the one he liked the best. Will loved the mango the best, asking Hannibal to cut him more. Will managed to eat

almost the whole fruit before Hannibal playfully swatted his hand away from the platter, “You’ll ruin your appetite. We’re about to eat.”

Will snickered, “You're about to, I’ve been eating this whole time!”

Hannibal tsked him, shaking his head with a smile on his lips, “You, Will Graham, are being ornery,” He swept up the platter decked with fruits, toast, and jellies and headed toward the patio door, “Come along, it’s time for us to start our breakfast.”

Will felt his chest clench as Hannibal opened the sliding door and walked out on the veranda. From Will's spot on the stool, he could see through the glass door and windows. Hannibal placed the food down on a low table next to two lounge chairs on either side. Hannibal straightened and waved him to join him on the deck. He hadn’t paid much attention to what was on the porch because he wasn’t supposed to. He shouldn’t be going outside. It was the rules.

WIll clenched his fists. The pounding of his heart would not go down and the wide open door seemed to grow and laugh at him.

A hand touched his face, making him jump. Hannibal was right in front of him. How did he manage to travel so fast?

“It’s okay, Will,” Hannibal guided Will to lean on him, “You’re safe with me, and you’ll be safe outside with me too.”

“I’m not– I’m not scared of being outside,” Will mumbled into Hannibal’s shirt.

Hannibal petted his hair, “Tell me what’s bothering you?”

“I–I don’t want to go through the door.”

“Doorways have only brought you fear and pain.” Hannibal noted.

Will nodded, “I’m not supposed to go out unless he tells me– and never the front door. Never the front door.”

“Do you remember when we first met?

Will looked up at him. The memory was hazy, but he treasured it nonetheless. Mainly, he remembered Hannibal holding him in his arms. Cradling him. “A little, yes.”

“You refused to leave the bedroom. You kept fighting to stay, because Dolarhyde had told you to.”

Will looked down, feeling a mix of fear and shame washed over him.

“But, mylimasis, do you remember what happened?”

“You carried me out,” Will answered.

“Yes, and you were free.”

“I know that,” Will tried to explain, “But it still feels wrong. It’s like everything is screaming at me to stay put.”

“It will feel like that for a while, it’s your mind's defense against the horrors you faced. But we have to keep trying,” Hannibal paused, touching Will lightly on the chin so he’d look up, “Do you trust me?”

“Yes,” Will whispered immediately.

Hannibal wasted no time. He scooped Will up from the stool and without another word strode to the door and carried him out.

Will cried out as he passed through the doorway, burying his head in Hannibal’s neck. But no shock came, but his heart still beat wildly. He clung to Hannibal afraid to let go. Hannibal sat down, keeping Will in his lap.

“Deep breaths. You’re okay.”

Will took stuttering breaths. He realized he could indeed breath, that he wasn’t on fire, that there wasn’t pain surging through his body.

“Shh, you’re okay now,” Hannibal rubbed his back up and down. Up and down. He timed his hand to match his breaths until Will was no longer gasping, “There, darling, you made it. Can you look at me?”

Will turned his head resting on Hannibal’s shoulder. He had indeed made it. He was outside! He’d made it through the door.

“I’m proud of you, Mylimasis,” Hannibal was smiling a ridiculously large grin. Will managed to smile tersely at Hannibal.

“Would you like to have more mango?” Hannibal prompted, moving to settle Will beside him on the lounge chair.

Will let his body be moved, but he kept a death grip on Hannibal’s shirt, ensuring the older man stayed close. He nodded solemnly for more of the delicious fruit. His voice wasn’t working. It felt stuck, like he could barely get air to lungs much less speak.

Hannibal leaned forward and plated him heaps of the orange fruit. He held out the plate for Will but Will just stared unwillingly at the plate, refusing to let go of Hannibal to take the food. He looked panicked up at Hannibal, realizing his predicament.

“Will?” Hannibal slowly put the food back down and turned to hug Will, “I’m here.”

Will sniffled suddenly feeling like sobs were about to break his composure.

Hannibal sighed softly, “You’re afraid I’ll leave?”

Will nodded.

“How about you sit in my lap and I’ll feed you breakfast?” Hannibal suggested. Will looked surprised. Hannibal smiled softly, “It’ll be our secret, yes? No telling Dr. Bloom.”

Will mischievously smirked and quickly squirreled his way into Hannibal’s lap. He threw his leg over Hannibal’s lap, straddling the man, as he rested his head on his shoulder. Hannibal’s hands found his waist pulling him closer. Will let out a content sigh.

“Would you like to stay like this for a while?” Hannibal asked. Will nodded enthusiastically. Even though he’d just woken, he felt exhausted from leaving the house. He snuggled closer to Hannibal, determined to make up his lost sleep from the night before.

*

He woke up feeling rather hot and sweaty, still plastered to Hannibal. Hannibal had shifted and was laying restfully on the lounge chair with Will on top of him.

Will peeled himself away, looking around the sunny deck. The sun was beating down on them, making Will insufferably warm. He stared at the sun, soaking in the knowledge that nothing separated him from the great openness. He grinned happily to himself. He was getting freer every day.

“The sunlight feels good, doesn’t it?”

Will glanced at Hannibal. He quirked a smile and found he could speak, “It feels hot.”

Hannibal chuckled, “Shall we vacate to cooler spaces?”

“Do we have to go inside?” Will pouted, not wanting to leave now he’d gotten out.

“No, but perhaps the garden or pool?”

“You have a pool?” Will practically shouted with excitement.

“Yes–” Hannibal tried to sit up but Will was buzzing with energy, bouncy up and down on top of him.

“Will–”

“Can we swim Hannibal? Please? Please!” Will begged.

“Yes,” Hannibal laughed. Will’s joy was intoxicating.

“Yes!” Will cheered, “Thank you! Thank you!”

Will tried to lean down and pepper Hannibal with kisses but Hannibal evaded them. Quickly sitting up and hoisting the boy up, until they were both standing beside the patio furniture. Will swayed slightly, his balance not quite settled. He grabbed a hold of Hannibal. He whined insistently, “Can’t you carry me, Hannibal? Please?”

“I think we would both do well with a quick stretch of the legs. Come, let me show you where the pool is.” Hannibal led him across the deck and down a flight of stairs to another veranda. Only this veranda had a bar, grill, and to Will’s utter delight a pool.

Will squealed at the sight, he pulled Hannibal towards the water, “It’s a pool! It’s a pool! You have a pool! Can I get in? Please?”

“Of course, darling.”

Will looked like he was about to plunge in, but turned back at the last moment. His hand tightening around Hannibal’s. He looked scared again, “Can you get in with me?”

“Will, I’m dressed right now, but you can get in. I won’t leave. I’ll stay right here watching you.”

Will stared him down, trying to judge if he could be trusted to stay. What if he let go of Hannibal and the man disappeared? He frowned, biting his lip nervously, “You won’t leave?”

“Never. I’ll be right here.” Hannibal assured him, meeting his eyes confidently.

Will took a breath, knowing Hannibal was honest. He nodded slowly, “Ok. But don’t move. Please?”

“I’ll stay right where I am.” Hannibal agreed.

Will shakily exhaled and loosened his fingers from his death grip on the older man. Hannibal did not disappear to Will’s great relief.

The older man’’s hands migrated to the belt of his night robe, “Why don’t you take the robe off? You’ll be more comfortable in the water, and I won’t have to worry about you drowning engulfed in a silly silk robe.”

Will raised an eyebrow, looking ever the part of an annoyed teenager, “I won’t drown. I’m a good swimmer.”

Hannibal hummed in agreement, “Yes, but for my sanity?”

Will rolled his eyes, but slipped the robe off. He did in fact feel more comfortable, but like hell if he was going to let Hannibal see it. He huffed as he passed the robe to Hannibal, “If you didn’t want your robe wet you could have just said so.”

Hannibal folded the fabric carefully. A sly smile etching his features, “Am I that obvious?”

“Like a neon sign,” Will said sarcastically, but quickly laughed a new thought, “I might get water on your fancy rugs if you're not careful.”

Hannibal scrunched his nose in distaste to which Will’s giggles grew.

“I promise I won’t,” Will laughed, “Your precious rugs are safe from me.”

Hannibal chuckled and shook his head, “You, my boy, are mischievous to your core, aren’t you?”

“Maybe,” Will winked, as he stepped into the pool. Slowly lowering himself into the delicious water. It felt incredible on the hot day. He kept his eyes on Hannibal, making sure the man didn’t move. It would be so much more fun if Hannibal was in the pool with him, but Hannibal seemed determined to stay dry by the edge of the water.

Will suddenly had an idea. He grinned at Hannibal, “You promised not to move right?”

“Not an inch,” Hannibal vowed. He didn’t seem to catch Will’s playful tune.

Will nodded. Turning in a circle in the pool, “You sure you don’t want to get in?”

“Maybe later, darling.”

“Okay,” Will nodded, trying his best to look sorrowful, ‘As long as you don’t move.”

Will swiped his hand across the water, spraying Hannibal directly in the face with water.

“Will? Wh–” Hannibal sputtered. Taken aback by the sudden water affront.

“Don’t move an inch!” Will called as he began to splash and kick furiously. His sole goal of getting Hannibal as soaked as possible.

Hannibal for his part, did not move from his spot, though he did attempt to throw his precious silk robe to dry land, and proceed to try to cover his face from the onslaught of water.

Will finally paused his game, panting from all the work. Hannibal cautiously lowered his hands– only to be met with a face full of water, “Will!”

Will laughed, grinning madly up at the man.

Hannibal raised his hands in surrender, “A truce! A truce please.”

Will stopped, cocking his head to the side, “What do you want?”

“I promised to stay here but,” Hannibal shook his hands, water droplets flying everywhere, “that was because I wanted to stay dry. Seeing how that has changed,” He gave Will a pointed look, “I’d like to move from this location.”

Will hummed, as if taking it into great consideration, “Depends. Where are you going to go?

Hannibal’s lips flashed a devious smile, “I’m planning on getting in the pool.”

“With me?”

“Precisely.”

“And what are you going to do with me?” Will demanded.

Hannibal straightened his sleeve cuffs, trying to look regal. He stated matter-of- factly, “I’m going to dunk you in the water.”

Will grinned, delighted at this new game they were playing, “You promise?”

Hannibal’s eyes flashed, “Absolutely.”

Will pushed off from the edge of the pool swimming away from Hannibal. Once he was far enough away, he called out, “Okay, but you have to catch me first!”

Hannibal wasted no time shedding his clothes down to his underwear, his tanned body looking radiant at the pool edge before diving into the pool. Will shrieked with delight as Hannibal swam towards him. Will did his best to avoid the man, but Hannibal was a fast swimmer catching him quickly in his arms.

“Truce! Truce!” Will laughed and shrieked all at the same time.

“No truce darling, I have a promise to keep,” Hannibal grinned as he heaved Will out of the water and th

rew him back down.

Will emerged a second later sputtering and laughing. “Again! Again! Throw me again!”

Hannibal joined in Will’s delights, laughing hard as he tossed the boy around the pool for the rest of the afternoon.

Chapter 15

The afternoon had been perfect. Will loved how Hannibal played with him. How he let him get away with splashing him. How easily he could manipulate the older man into letting him do as he pleased.

Which was how he ended up eating spaghetti, cinnamon rolls, and ice cream for dinner. After eating everything on his plate he promptly passed out on the couch. He awoke in the morning in his own bed with pajamas he hadn't put on himself, feeling rested and happy.

He bounded out of bed, and went directly to Hannibal's room.

"Hannibal?" Will called when he didn't see the man immediately.

The voice behind him made him jump, "Good morning, Will. Did you sleep well?"

Hannibal had emerged from the closet. Dressed in a brown plaid suit, his white shirt collar popped up with matching tie ends hanging down. The older man began tying the ends into an elaborate knot before folding the collar down into place. Hannibal's hair was meticulously gelled, not a single hair out of place. He looked so good.

Will had to force his mouth closed before he gaped in awe of the handsome man.

"I– I eh, yeah, I slept well. You look really hot– I mean– eh, um good. You look goodl," Will stumbled over his words as his cheeks turned scarlet. He was very much distracted by the smirk Hannibal shot at him.

Hannibal chuckled, thankfully not saying anything about Will's slip up. He walked to the boy and pulled him into a hug, kissing the top of his head to Will’s delight. Will squirmed closer, so he could wrap his arms around Hannibal's back.

"Has anyone told you that you shouldn't flirt?" Hannibal mused.

Will blushed harder, if that was even possible. He cleared his throat, hoping his next words came out right, "Has anyone told you, Doctor Lecter, you shouldn't look this good in the morning?"

Hannibal laughed a resounding sound deep in his chest.

“You come to me in a state of undress. What's a man to do? I have to look my best.”

Will giggled. He liked how Hannibal teased him. He liked how he could tease Hannibal. It felt comforting and right. He snuggled closer to the man, "Why are you dressed like this anyway?"

"What? You don't like it?" Hannibal gasped.

Will looked up the feeling of dread suddenly taking him. Did he say the wrong thing? He bit his lip, worryingly, "No, Hannibal, I like it. I'm sorry."

Hannibal cupped his cheek, "I was teasing Will. You don't have to like it if you don't. I won't mind."

Will felt his anxiety relax. It was always simmering just under the surface, but sometimes it boiled over. Hannibal always helped him stay calm though. He smiled hesitantly, "I do like it, but you don't wear suits unless… unless– are you going out?"

Hannibal smiled, "Yes, and I'd like you to come with me."

"Where are we going?"

"I have a friend who owns a bookstore. They are looking for someone to help around the shop. I thought we might go and see if this would interest you."

Will swallowed, fearfully, "Like a job?"

Hannibal stroked his hair, "Yes, a job. It would meet the FBI requirements and you could gain some working experience."

Will shivered, but he knew he needed to obey the FBI. Jack Crawford had told him he'd be charged for the murders if he didn't. "What do I have to do?" Will asked nervously.

"Nothing difficult," Hannibal assured him, "They just have a few cleaning and organizing tasks for you."

Will breathed out a relieved sigh. He was afraid he'd have to talk to strangers all day. He didn't know if he could handle that.

"Now, shall we get you dressed for your first job interview?"

"Interview?" Will worried.

Hannibal hushed him, "I've spoken to them already. They would like your help. We are just going in to introduce ourselves to the owners of the shop."

"Oh."

"But we should still look our best," Hannibal grinned mischievously.

Will cocked his head to the side questioningly. Hannibal pulled him out of the master bedroom and back to Wil's. He opened the closet and revealed a half full closet of clothes. Will's mouth dropped at how many Hannibal had gotten him.

"These are for me?"

"Of course! And I will get you better clothes when you're up for going shopping – not today– but sometime." Hannibal promised, "I ordered these and had them delivered, hopeful they fit

well.”

Will ran his fingers across the hanging jungle of clothes. The fabrics were all soft and nothing was terribly bright. Will laughed in delight when he found a shirt with a small dog embroidered over the heart. He pulled it out and showed Hannibal, “Can I wear this, please?”

“Of course, but let's try something other than sweatpants,” Hannibal negotiated.

Will pouted, but turned and selected a pair of soft brown pants. He raised an eyebrow at Hannibal for approval. Hannibal smiled at his choice. The pants were practically the same shade as his own suit. Will was unintentionally making them a matching set.

After helping him dress, Hannibal made a large breakfast full of Will’s favorite’s: fresh mangos, beignets, waffles, sausages, eggs. Will ate his fill, managing not to freak out when Hannibal began putting the leftovers away. He still felt the urge to eat everything he could, but Hannibal always stopped him before it was too much.

They still exited through the garage because Will couldn’t bare going through the front door. It loomed ominously in Hannibal’s foyer, mocking his inability to leave. Will had stared at it for a long while before Hannibal had gently pulled him away from the door.

They piled into the bentley. Hannibal was telling him about the city as they drove the short distance across Baltimore. Will felt bad, but he tuned the man out, focusing instead on the sunlight flashing between the buildings and trees. When the car slowed, Will was so lost in his daze that Hannibal had to shake his shoulder slightly.

Will blinked, “What? Sorry?”

“We’re here,” Hannibal repeated, nodding to an old victorian looking house. The had parked outside on the street. There was a path through a small yard to some stone steps up to the front door. Hannibal unbuckled his seat and got out of the car, walking around to Will’s side. He opened the door, offering his hand.

Will gingerly took it, stepping out into the unknown air. He immediately crowded Hannibal’s side. Hannibal wrapped his arm around the boy’s waist keeping him close as he led them up to the door.

A hand painted ‘Open’ sign hung on the door. Hannibal opened the door a small chime ringing somewhere off in the house.

“It’s called Book Nook,” Hannibal said.

Will agreed with the name. The old house had been converted into a misshapen library. Every room that once had been a living space was now filled with shelves and precariously stacked books.

Hannibal’s arm fell from his waist, and took his hand. Hannibal walked deeper into the house, looking for the elusive owners. They wove their way through rooms, passing cases of

old antiques and furniture arranged to sit and read. It felt cozy in the jumbled room and Will felt himself relaxing.

Will spotted a woman placing books on an old piano. He was surprised when he recognized her. She was a nurse from the hospital, the one who had given him the little dog sticker. He pulled on Hannibal's arm and whispered into the man's ear, "She's from the hospital!"

Hannibal smiled and nodded. He raised a hand to the woman, "Nurse Abayomi!"

She turned. Smiling as she saw Will and Hannibal. "Doctor Lecter, Will! It's so good to see you!"

"Please call me, Hannibal. We are not in a hospital."

Will liked the way Abayomi's cheeks crinkled as she smiled; like she was genuinely happy to see them.

"Then you must call me Yesira," She turned to Will, "How are you Will? Feeling better, I hope?"

Will nodded shyly, his hand still fisted Hannibal's jacket. He wanted to duck behind the man but made do with staring at the floor.

Thankfully, Hannibal picked up the conversation, knowing Will didn't want to talk, "Thank you for letting us stop in. Will needs work and it was generous of you to let us barge in on you."

Yesira waved him away good naturedly. "It's no problem, Hannibal. When I told Anna about the situation she agreed instantly. We just hope he likes it here." Yesira shot Will with a smile.

She led them between the winding book shelves. They passed through several rooms until they arrived in an open space with a large desk piled high with old books. Hidden behind several stacks of books was a frazzled haired woman. Her nose stuck deep in an ancient volume, her horn-rimmed eye-glasses poked above the gilded cover.

"Anna?" Yesira called.

The woman glanced up. Her eyes lit up when she saw Yesira. She put down her book, looking up at the group. "Is this Dr. Lecter and Will, Yesi?"

She stood and walked around the desk. She looked like an art teacher Will had once in school with wild brown hair, mismatched clothing, and piercing eyes. She stuck out her hand to Hannibal, "Dr. Lecter, I'm Anna Abayomi. It's nice to finally meet you. My wife has told me all about working with you."

Hannibal shook her hand, "A pleasure. You're a professor of literature, correct?"

"Contemporary literature at Georgetown."

"I must say I was rather impressed with your writings over Vonnegut."

She grinned, “Thank you, Vonnegut was the subject of my dissertation. After studying his work for so long I don’t know if I hate him or love him.”

Hannibal chuckled, “The struggle of a working academic.”

“Comes with the work,” Anna shrugged, turning to Will. She didn’t try to shake his hand, “You’re Will Graham?”

Will shuffled closer to Hannibal. He spoke in a quiet voice, “Yes, ma’am…”

“Gotta call me Anna. I hate titles. Yesi says you need a job, and we happen to need an assistant. You wanna hear about it?”

Will nodded. He didn’t really know what to think of her, she was blunt and energetic, but she seemed kind.

“Now, this shop, it’s my and Yesi’s hobby. We manage the store, but we both work. When we’re here we are often busy helping customers so we don’t have time to get things looking sharp. We’d love for someone to help out in making sure everythings clean and put away.”

Will perked up, “I’m good at cleaning!”

Anna grinned, “Awesome! Because I have rooms that haven’t been dusted since the 18th century. Now how do you feel about talking to customers?”

“I–I don’t know” Will whispered, his hold tightening on Hannibal’s jacket. Hannibal placed a comforting hand on the small of his back.

Yesira smiled encouragingly, “That’s ok. Not a whole lot of people come in here. If they have a question just send them our way, ok?”

Anna laughed, “Yeah, the main group we get coming in are my students trying to impress me, when you find them just tell them Dr. Anna Abayomi is out.”

Will frowned seriously but nodded, trying to remember everything they said.

“What do you think, Will?” Hannibal nudged Will lightly on his shoulder.

Will swallowed. He knew he had to say yes. The FBI would put him in prison if I didn’t do what they wanted. However, Hannibal had found this job and nurse Abayami was there. Anna was different but nice. He also liked all the books surrounding him. There were lots of nooks and crannies to hide in. It wasn’t too bright and the smell of old books and mothballs were calming. He looked up at Hannibal, “I like it.”

“So, when can you start?” Anna asked, clapping her hands together.

“I have to get approval from Jack Crawford,” Hannibal answered for him, “But seeing as his timeline is tight, I’d say within the week. Does that work with you?”

The ladies nodded. Yesira held out a book for Will, “Before you go, I thought you might like this book.”

Will took it shyly. Glancing down at it the cover had two dogs and a cat.

“The Incredible Journey?” Will read slowly. It still felt odd reading new things after years of nothing in Dolarhyde’s house. Sometimes it felt like he’d forgotten how to do the simplest of things, but they were slowly coming back to him.

Anna grinned, “It's about a bunch of animals that journey through the wilderness to find their family.”

Will traced the picture of the golden retriever with his finger. He liked how the cover felt under the pads of his fingers. “Thank you,” he breathed softly.

“Why don’t you go start it, Will?” Hannibal suggested, pointing to a reading nook just in the other room. There was an old love seat nestled between two overflowing mismatched shelves that faced a window looking out on the street. Will carried his book over and settled in the seat. Hannibal was discussing details with the shop’s owners. Will didn’t think he’d understand half their conversation plus it would probably make him queasy with nerves. He distracted himself by diving into the book, eager to learn about the animal’s adventures.

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Will didn’t put the book down all afternoon and evening. Hannibal had to tell him to close the book at dinner or else he wouldn’t have eaten due to Luath, Bodger, and Tao’s adventures through the Canadian wilderness. The only times his attention was diverted was to ask Hannibal for help with a word he didn’t know.

They were now sitting in the living room deep into the evening. Hannibal sat at the corner of the couch reading from some book that Will couldn’t pronounce the name of while Will rested sprawled across the couch with his head resting on Hannibal’s thigh.

He sighed unhappily as he dropped the book to his chest, staring up at the ceiling. Hannibal lowered his own book, running a hand through Will’s curls, “What’s the matter, darling?” Hannibal asked softly. The boy had gotten impatient with himself several times when he didn’t understand a word. Hannibal was trying to ease his frustration.

“My eyes hurt,” Will blinked furiously as if trying to clear the tiredness from his gaze.

“Your eyes are tired from reading all day,” Hannibal mused.

Will rubbed his eyes with the palms of his hands, “But I want to finish the book!”

“And you will, but maybe tomorrow.”

He huffed, but turned towards Hannibal and curled so he could cuddle closer to the man. His head still pillowed in Hannibal’s lap. Hannibal continued playing with his hair, but stopped as a thought came to him, “Will, have you ever worn glasses?”

Will's eyes flickered up, "No. Dad didn't like doctors."

"Hmm, you may need glasses. That may be why your eyes hurt."

"Oh," Will sounded a bit surprised, "Could I read more with glasses?"

Hannibal chuckled, "Yes, but your eyes may still get tired if you read all day."

Will pouted, "Stupid eyes."

"I happen to like those eyes," Hannibal argued, "They're like staring into two perfect sapphire diamonds. Sparking with so much life and untold mysteries."

Will didn't know how to take this, "They're just eyes, Hannibal."

"Not just eyes," Hannibal said seriously, "Your eyes. Which I happen to admire every chance I get, because it means my dear Will is with me."

Will giggled. He supposed it felt nice to be appreciated and admired for being something other than a sexual object. Being like for just being himself.

"Shall I schedule a visit with the eye doctor this week?"

Will nodded; proud of himself for not freaking out. Normal people went out all the time. Running errands, going shopping, getting glasses. Will wanted to be normal too.

"How did you like the book shop?" Hannibal inquired.

"It was really cluttered," Will stated, "But that made it feel homey and safe."

Hannibal nodded, "There were lots of rooms. Will that be frightening?"

Will shrugged, "I don't know. I don't like the front room though because– because…" Will shivered.

"Because of the door," Hannibal finished.

"Yeah, I don't like being close to it."

"You were fine leaving the house though?" Hannibal worried.

Will blushed, "Because I knew I was leaving with you."

Hannibal smiled fondly at the boy, "I will tell Yesira and Anna not to assign you anything in that room. And I will pick you up at the door until you're ready to come out on your own."

Will nuzzled his face in Hannibal's thigh, "Thank you, Hannibal."

"No worries, my darling," Hannibal bent down and kissed the top of Will's head, making the boy's heart leap with excitement.

“Now, what did you think of your new employers?” Hannibal asked, trying to calm his own heart as he felt Will’s increase with a single kiss.

“I like nurse Abayomi. She likes dogs and she’s always really nice. And her teeth are really white,” Will blurted out, reddening as he realized the teeth observation was probably not socially acceptable.

But Hannibal made no notice that he found it strange, instead he nodded, “And Anna?”

“She’s…” Will didn’t want to come across that he didn’t like the woman, but she was very different from Yesira.

“It’s alright, Will,” Hannibal encouraged.

“She’s a little loud– like her voice and clothing. Like she wants to be seen. And-and she’s really blunt and her tone isn’t like Nurse Abayomi’s. I think she likes to joke, but it’s kind of hard to understand sometimes.”

Hannibal nodded to all of this, “Anna is very different from Yesira. But they complement each other. Anna seems to be more energetic and outspoken, while Yesira is calmer and has a nurse’s disposition to be caring and gentle. They go well together.”

“They’re married?” Will puzzled. He had heard them refer to each other as wives, but it was still strange to see such a couple after his strict and polarizing upbringing. His father would have turned up his nose at such a thing.

“Yes, I believe Yesira said five years come April.”

“A-and that’s ok? Like it’s ok– because they're both women? That they can– Um–uh–” Will fumbled for his question.

“Yes, darling. They love and respect each other. It doesn’t matter what gender they are.”

“Oh,” Will said thoughtfully. To be honest he hadn’t really thought about the relational side of it. His education growing up and the dragon had made him focus on the physical aspect– not an emotional, mutually respectful relationship.

“Does that bother you?” Hannibal asked.

“No,” Will said quickly, “It’s just different from what I know, but I’m glad they're happy.”

“You’re extraordinary, Will Graham.” Hannibal smiled down at the sweet boy in his lap. Will smiled back at him.

Chapter 16

Will picked at his breakfast food. It was scrambled eggs and oatmeal. Usually Will would gobble them up, but after eating everything sweet and delicious Hannibal made, he found he did not like the eggs and oatmeal. He despised their textures and hated their taste. He wanted toast or beignets. Or something that didn't make him want to rock or pinch his face up into a frown.

But how could he say those things to Hannibal? He finally had hot food in front of him. He shouldn't complain. He should be grateful. He should open his mouth and shove the fork in and moan because it was good. Good and irritating and stupid food.

He squirmed in his seat, then stopped immediately. The sweater Hannibal had dressed him in was itchy. Will wanted to rip it off, but it was clothes. Clothes! He had prayed and begged for clothes. Now that he had them, he wanted them gone. How could he be so selfish? He slipped his hands under his thighs, trying to calm down. He wanted to rock himself, but everytime he moved the sweater scratched and itched his sensitive skin. He wanted to scream, but held it in when Hannibal entered. Will forced a smiled on his face when Hannibal kissed his forehead sitting beside him.

"Good morning, Will. There's exciting news in the paper today," Hannibal scooted the paper across the table as Will tried not to fling the disgusting food away.

On the front page was his own likeness staring back at him. His annoyed irritation from breakfast was suddenly fuel for panic at the sight of his old school photo. It was of when he was in high school. He looked so young, so innocent. Will frowned at the picture. That wasn't him. Not anymore. The dragon had changed him. He knew that already. And it had made him sad, but seeing his picture now, it made him angry.

He pushed the offending page away. Angry at the page. Angry that his sweater was itchy. Angry at the eggs.

Hannibal raised a brow, "Everything all right?"

Will stabbed his scrambled eggs savagely in answer. He didn't know why the page made him so upset, but it did. He wanted to rip it up, but deciding decimating his eggs was a good enough trade . *Stupid eggs! Stupid sweater! Stupid picture!*

Hannibal took the newspaper, as if trying to soothe Will by explaining its contents. He read out loud.

"Boy kidnapped by FBI's allusive Tooth Fairy survives for two years in his clutches." Hannibal clicked his tongue in distaste, "What are journalists studying these days?"

"What else does it say?" Will asked rather vehemently.

Hannibal shot Will a curious look before eyeing down the page, "Will Graham suffered from multiple injuries sustained in his capture. He was treated at St. Mary's Hospital before being released into FBIs custody. Will Graham survives his father John Graham who is a believed victim of the tooth fairy."

"Why are they calling him the tooth fairy? That's stupid," Will hissed ruthlessly.

"That's what the FBI nicknamed him," Hannibal tried to explain.

"He's the dragon! Not a tooth fairy! No wonder he was so angry all the time!"

"Will–"

"And I had to deal with it! Stupid newspapers! Stupid reporters! They could say whatever they'd want– I was the one– I was the one getting punished for them! Me!"

He threw his fork down on the table. He stood up so fast he knocked his chair backwards. "I hate them! I hate them!" He screamed.

Hannibal stared at him stunned. Will suddenly could not stand being there in the open. He turned and fled upstairs to his room. Rage still coursed through his veins as he slammed his door closed. Suddenly alone he felt the anger deflate quickly displaced by a choking dread. He bolted to the closet as he realized what he'd done.

He had yelled. He'd thrown a tantrum in front of Hannibal. What was the look Hannibal had given him? Was the man angry? Disappointed? Will tried to breath but his head was spinning far too fast.

He dived behind the new clothes Hannibal had bought him. He ripped the stupid sweater off his back, letting himself drown in the softer hanging fabrics. It was dark, it was small, it was safe. Tucked behind the hanging clothes at the back of the closet. He could breathe there. He drew his knees to his chest rocking back and forth. He never blew up like that. Not with his father, definitely not with the dragon. Why did the dam have to break now? Why with Hannibal?

The man was nothing but good to him, how could he stand Will to be so disrespectful? If Hannibal were smart he'd send him packing. A strangled sob escaped as he thought about Hannibal leaving him– about him not wanting him. Will's whole body quaked.

"Will?" Hannibal's concerned voice sounded in the room.

Will covered his mouth, afraid the man would find him in this state. Then he'd see what a mess he was. How he wasn't worth the trouble. He stayed quiet as Hannibal stepped into the closet, "Will? Mylimasis?" Hannibal paused. Surely he must have seen the clothes moving with Will's frantic rocking. Surely he knew where Will hid.

Hannibal sunk to the ground sitting along the wall outside the wall of clothes. Close enough Will could hear him breath, almost feeling the comforting heat of his body. He thought Hannibal might rip away the clothes, shove the hangers aside, and drag him out. That's

certainly what the dragon would have done. But instead Hannibal just sat on the other side. He wasn't lurking or waiting for Will to show a weakness, he was just sitting and being with him.

"I brought Blue," Hannibal said softly. The soft stuffed animal was slipped under the clothes, resting next to him. An offering for him. Will took the dog immediately, crushing the animal in his tight embrace. He felt safer with his comfort animal. It was so soft. It cooled his irritated prickling skin. It smelled like him and Hannibal.

"Would you like to be left alone, mylimasis?" Hannibal asked gently.

No. Will not want to be left alone. Neither did he particularly want to face the daunting man. He stayed quiet hoping that Hannibal would just stay where he was.

But Hannibal shifted away, "I don't want distress you, so I'll leave you be."

Hannibal moved to stand when a hand reached out grabbing his arm before he could leave.

"Please," Will whispered.

Hannibal sat down again, taking Will's offered hand in his own. Squeezing the hand as he wanted to hold Will, "I'm here, Will."

"I'm sorry," Will spoke again.

"There's nothing to be sorry for," Hannibal said.

Will didn't believe him. But he was learning that Hannibal tended to be stubborn when it came to things involving how Will saw himself.

Hannibal spoke again, "You did not like the article."

"I don't like the picture."

Hannibal scoffed, "It's a good picture."

Will smiled softly, of course Hannibal liked the picture. He sighed, "It's not me. Not anymore."

"No?"

"That Will died when the dragon took me."

"Ah," Hannibal answered, "Well you look just like him."

"No I don't," Will whispered. His body was marked by the dragon. The ring of bruises round his neck, the slight limp when he walked, the painful stretch of lacerated skin across his back. There was no doubt– he was not the same.

Hannibal said nothing to that, just squeezed his hand in comfort.

"So you are the new Will Graham?"

Will found himself nodding, "Yes."

"I like the new Will Graham."

"No you don't"

"I do."

"He's really stupid."

"I don't think so."

"Yes he is. And he gets angry now."

"Hm, I'd like to see him angry more."

"He broke your fancy dishes."

"He can break as many as he'd like."

Will had the hilarious image of him knocking over Hannibal's china cabinet. The painted fine china tea cups and plates shattering everywhere. He giggled at the thought.

"You're crazy Hannibal," Will chuckled.

"Maybe, though I think I'm more curious than anything."

"Curious about what?"

"About you," Hannibal low voice sounded.

"Oh." Will desperately wanted to see Hannibal's face. To see his miniscule facial expressions. The crinkle of his eyelid, the movement of his lips, the quickness of his breath. Was he really saying those words, or was Will making it up? Will couldn't tell by just his voice.

Hannibal moved his hand, taking Will's with him. He brought Will's knuckles to his lips, Will could tell because of the warm breath flickering across the skin of his hand. He held his breath waiting for what Hannibal would do. Hannibal breathed before pressing a devoted kiss upon Will's hand, "I want to know everything about you, Will."

"I– I don't like eggs," Will blurted out before he could stop himself, "And oatmeal– it tastes bad– I mean– I just don't like it! I'm sorry, sir. I'm sorry!"

Will ripped his hand away needing to stem desperately. Hannibal didn't try to hold on. He sat patiently, until he heard Will calming down. Will managed to calm down, keeping just a steady rocking for comfort. Only then did Hannibal continue.

"Will. I'm so proud of you for telling me. I want you to know, you don't have to eat foods you don't like. You have a whole pantry and kitchen at your disposal. We can find something you

like."

"T–thank you sir," Will whispered, not expecting such a kind reaction.

"Did you not like your shirt either Will?" Hannibal asked, eyeing the discarded sweater on the ground.

"I'm sorry! It's just–it's itchy and I can't–" Will clutched Blue tightly, trying to keep calm.

"Shh, baby," Hannibal said from behind the clothing wall, "You're such a good boy telling me. You can tell me if you don't like what you're wearing. You have choices too."

Will sniffled into Blue feeling overjoyed, “Thank you.”

“We can go through your closet and make sure you like everything. Would you like to try a different shirt right now? Or would you like none for a while?” Hannibal asked.

“None,” Will answered, holding Blue close to his chest. All he wanted to feel right now close was Blue’s soft fur and maybe Hannibal’s clean linen shirt.

"Good boy,” Hannibal praised, “Now, do you want to stay in here or would you like to try something else for breakfast?"

“Stay with you.”

“Of course, Mylimasis.”

“Thank you Hannibal,” Will whispered. Hannibal always knew the right thing to say. Will wanted to let him know how much he appreciated his kindness and understanding. He wanted to promise to reciprocate the kind man’s actions, “I want to know everything about you too.”

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Alana Bloom came over later that day. She kept giving Hannibal looks whenever Will hovered near the man. But Will couldn't help himself. After his panic attack, Hannibal had sat with him and said the sweetest things. Will eventually managed to crawl out the closet into Hannibal's embrace. Since then, he hadn't left Hannibal's side. It was like he could breathe better when Hannibal was there. Whenever the older man's eyes met his or their bodies would brush Will's trembling heart would ache with joy. He loved the feeling, so he sought out Hannibal's gaze and his gentle touches. And Hannibal let him. Encouraging his glances with soft smiles and tugging Will closer whenever the boy was hesitant. Will felt utter bliss.

Dr. Bloom however, did not seem to approve. She would huff and her eyes would narrow. Will wasn't sure if he was the cause of her disdain or if Hannibal had done something. He did know she was watching them closely and it made him nervous. Hannibal didn't seem to notice though. He let Will sit on the counter as he made dinner while Alana frowned at them from the kitchen seat.

Hannibal platted the lavish dinner, before turning to Will.

"Are you ready to eat?"

Will nodded from his perch on the counter top.

"Let's get you down then," Hannibal's hands found his waist as he helped Will slide from the counter. Will stood breathless in front of Hannibal, trapped between the counter and the man. He smiled up at Hannibal as his hands rested lightly on the man's chest, "Thank you."

Hannibal kissed the top of his head before releasing Will. He turned to Alana who was giving him a death glare. He gestured to the dining room, "Shall we?"

Hannibal served a lavish dinner, thick cuts of steak with a sweet honey glaze, roasted vegetables Will had no idea existed, and the fluffiest biscuits that seemed to melt on the tongue. Will dove in, ignoring the testy silence of the two doctors. The food was delicious and he moaned around his fork. Alana shifted uncomfortably at his sounds but Hannibal just gave him an amused grin before cutting into his own meat. They ate their meal without conversation, which Will liked. He didn't like having to worry about following lines of conversation and trying to uncover hidden meanings in meaningless small talk. He was used to being quiet and that's how he liked it.

Unfortunately, Alana seemed uncomfortable with the quiet. She cleared her throat to speak, "So, Will, what did you think of the bookstore?"

Hannibal had informed the FBI of Will's intention to start working there as part of their plot. Alana, being part of the FBI, probably knew more than Will did about the job. He shrugged, "It's nice."

“You start tomorrow– are you feeling anxious or excited?”

It had been one of the things Hannibal had broken to him in the morning. Will wasn’t thrilled at the idea of leaving Hannibal’s safe presence and the now familiar house, but he had little choice in the matter. Hannibal hadn’t asked him questions like that. He just knew how Will was feeling. Will hated talking it out. Especially with Alana who still felt unfamiliar and distant. Will refused to meet her eyes and mumbled, “Excited, I guess.”

“That’s great. But you know it’s okay to tell us if you're feeling nervous. We’re here if you need us.”

Will hummed his agreement, suddenly finding his roasted vegetables very interesting as he scooted them across his plate.

Alana seemed to realize he was shutting down so she changed the topic, “Is this your first job?”

“No.”

Hannibal glanced at him curiously, “What other jobs have you worked?”

“I’ve mowed people’s lawns since I was like ten. Paper delivery before that. And for a while every summer I worked at fishing docks– sorting the catch and stuff.”

“We have our very own fisherman,” Hannibal ruffled Will’s hair. Will couldn’t help but lean into his touch, giggling as Hannibal messed up his hair.

Alana was stoic.She cleared her throat, “How did you like working there?”

“It was nice, ‘cept when you’d get stung by jellies,” Will answered, sighing as Hannibal drew his hand away.

Hannibal praised him though making him feel immediately better, “You are quite brave working with deadly animals. Even I would be nervous around such creatures.”

Will sat up straighter, preening under Hannibal’s words.

“Did you have a boss there?” Alana interjected.

Will sunk in his seat, “Yeah, never really talked to him though. Dad just dropped me off and I’d go work all day.”

Alana jumped on the words. Turning it back into a lesson, “You should be able to talk to your employer. Do you feel like you can talk to the Abayomi’s?”

Will slumped further down. He mumbled, “I guess so.”

"How did the shop owners make you feel?" Alana prompted, she clearly wanted him to say something specific. Being led in such a way irritated Will. It was patronizing. He wasn't stupid.

He picked at his food unhappily. He wanted to snap at Alana for trying to get him to open up. He didn't want to open up– not to her. He glanced at Hannibal an idea coming to him.

"They're gay," he stated matter of factly.

Alana's eyes widened fractionally in surprise, "Oh, well that's nice."

She shot a look at Hannibal who just shrugged amused. She huffed but turned back to Will, "Do you have any feelings about that?"

Will fought the urge to roll his eyes, instead he shrugged, "My dad would never let me work somewhere like that."

"Your father was foolish," Hannibal said as he took another bite of the pink meat.

Alana gasped, "Hannibal!" She turned to Will, "He doesn't mean that sweetheart."

"Don't I?" Hannibal continued eating.

Alana looked aghast. She stood, "Hannibal, if you don't mind, I'd like to talk to you privately."

Hannibal set his utensils down elegantly. He seemed perfectly put together as he stood, but Will could tell by the little dip of his lips the man was annoyed. He looked pointedly at Will, "Eat your dinner, Will."

Will ducked his head, accepting Hannibal's subtle rebuke. He had poked the bear. Hannibal may have poked it too, but Will started it. And now Hannibal was about to get the brunt of the bear's attack. But Will didn't let himself be bothered, Hannibal could handle himself against Dr. Bloom. Will had to hide his amused smile as the pair left, leaving him alone. Will grinned to himself. He had the whole dinner to himself without awkward conversations. He grabbed his fork– determined to eat everything before the bear came back and tried to get him to talk again.

*

"What the hell are you doing with him?!"

"I don't know what you mean."

They were standing in Hannibal's home library. The door securely shut so as to not disturb the boy who was probably having the time of his life left alone with all that food. Hannibal could see right through Will's little games and he couldn't help but feel fondly proud of the Will for his antics. Unfortunately, Alana was not pleased.

"Hannibal, you're manipulating his insecurities!"

"I'm not manipulating him–"

"You called his father foolish," Alana said pointedly.

"His father was foolish. He filled Will's world with bigotry. I'm not to be blamed for pointing out the obvious."

Alana flushed, "I'm not saying there's no truth to your statement, but the way you framed his father is in a very negative light."

"I'll say once more, I'm pointing out the obvious. The more negative the light the better. The man was abusive."

"That's not the point Hannibal. Will's father was the main authoritative figure in his life before Dolarhyde. His only family for god sake!"

"And? We need him to recognize how unhealthy and abusive even his own father was to him, so he can recognize positive relationships."

Alana snorted, "Positive relationships? Is that what you're convincing yourself this is?"

Hannibal felt his lip curl, "I would like to think my relationship with Will Graham is a positive one built on mutual trust and respect."

Alana had the audacity to laugh, "Trust and respect? Is that why Will is hanging off your arm? Why he *positively* leaps whenever you touch him? And when you kissed him– god damn it Hannibal, you fucking kissed him– he was keening for more? That is completely unacceptable behavior!"

"He craves attention–"

"Don't give me that, you know better!"

"He is seeking out safe interactions. For two years he has known nothing but a man that would hurt him.To be touched meant to be punished or violated. Now he's trying to understand how to interact with those who won't hurt him. Forgive me for trying to dispel the notion that a kiss on the head means anything more than tender fondness for a loved one!" Hannibal's chest heaved as he tried to gather his emotions back under control. Thinking of Will put cracks in his facade. The foreign emotions, so long ago lost, all at once resurfacing.

Alana eyed him darkly, "It's not appropriate."

Hannibal sighed exasperatedly, "I am aware."

"Then you should stop."

"I will not stop showing Will much needed affection. He desires it and deserves it. Likewise, it is necessary for his therapy."

"You are not his therapist–"

"Which is a good thing, for then my behavior would be quite inappropriate. Thankfully, I am not in that position so I can ethically hold and touch him when he needs comfort."

Alana crossed her arms, "Hannibal, you may not be his official therapist, but you know this relationship you're cultivating is creating unhealthy dependency. On him and on you."

"Will is an incredible individual. I would not wish to create a co-dependency that would hinder his growth, but that simply isn't what is happening here," Hannibal argued, though he knew there was a semblance of truth in her words.

"So, if he were to move locations and stay somewhere else– you would have no qualms with it?"

Hannibal frowned, "You would be removing the first stable life he's had–I would argue– his whole life. He's just now learning to swim and you are suggesting sending him spiraling with no paddle or lifeboat to hold on to?"

"And you're his paddle?" Alana threw her hands in the air, exasperated.

"I'm teaching him how to swim. Why are you insistent that my relationship with Will Graham is negative? I've done nothing but try to help him.

“Even best intentions can be twisted, Hannibal,” Alana walked closer to him, as if to comfort him, “Perhaps, it would be best if Will went someplace else for a while.”

“No!” Will screamed. He’d just opened the library door to hear Alana’s last words. He’d come to ask if there were more biscuits and had found his fate being discussed.

“Will!” Alana gasped.

“Please don’t send me away!” Will begged, tears already falling down his cheeks.

Hannibal strode over to the boy, pulling him into a fierce hug, “You are not going anywhere.”

“I want to stay with you! Here! I don’t want to go anywhere else,” Will whined as he clung to the older man.

“You’re staying with me,” Hannibal growled.

“Hannibal, this needs to be discussed!” Alana said pointedly.

“Not tonight,” Hannibal shot back vehemently.

Alana pursed her lips but conceded, “Fine. But I’m getting him a therapist. I don’t want your influence to be the only one affecting him.”

Hannibal hissed, “Trust me, you’ve affected him plenty tonight. Now please, if you don’t mind, leave us.”

Alana retreated a step, taken aback by Hannibal’s ferocity. She frowned at her friend, “I’m shocked by you, Hannibal. You should know better.”

Hannibal could feel Will’s tears seeping through his shirt and he felt no pity for her. “You can see yourself out, Alana.”

Alana scowled but turned and left the library. Hannibal gave his full attention to Will. He quickly hoisted Will up into his arms. Will’s legs wrapped around his waist and fingers dug into his shoulders.Hannibal ignored the pain and carried Will up to his room, hushing him with soft assurances the whole way.

Hannibal paused outside Will’s door, pondering if he should tuck him in Will’s bed or selfishly take him to his own room. Will made the decision easy as he cried pitifully in his ear, “Can I stay with you tonight, Hannibal? Please?”

Hannibal turned to his room. Wasting no time in bringing the boy to his bed and laying him down gently on the mattress. Hannibal tried to stand up, but Will held on to him. Pulling him down over his body.

Hannibal tried to argue, “Will–”

“Please? I like it when I can feel you.”

“Will, I’m too heavy. I don’t want to hurt you.”

“You won’t! I like having your weight. It’s comforting. Please?”

Hannibal sighed. He was defenseless against Will. He shifted over the boy, then lowered himself slowly over Will’s small body. He was afraid he would crush him, but Will just sighed happily as he was pressed into the mattress. Hannibal could feel Will’s nervous energy twitching through his body. Hannibal kissed Will’s forehead before resting his own head in the crook of Will’s neck, nosing at Will’s unruly locks. He stayed still and quiet as he waited for the young man to calm down.

“Is she going to take me away?” Will whispered after his body had stopped shaking.

“No.” Hannibal answered adamantly.

“Why does she not want me here? Did I do something wrong?”

Hannibal’s heart broke every time Will blamed himself. As if he was the reason for every bad thing that happened. “No, darling. I did something wrong, but that won’t change your place here. There’s no getting rid of you.”

“What did you do wrong?” Will almost whispered in reverence.

Hannibal raised his head, finding Will’s eyes immediately, “Alana does not think my relationship with you is appropriate.”

“What?” Will’s eyes flashed with anger, “Why?”

“I agreed to let you stay with me, but you have become much more important to me in that time. You’re more than someone I can offer shelter to, mylimasis. I enjoy having you in my life and I hope you like me as well–”

“I do!” Will agreed wholehearted.

Hannibal smiled down at Will, running his hand through his messy hair. “I’m very glad you do, but Dr. Bloom believes I should be more professional with you.”

“You are professional!” Will piped up.

Hannibal chuckled, “No, I am not. Not with you, Will.”

Will shivered at the way Hannibal said his name. It was heavy and full of meaning. It made his heart beat quicker.

“Alana sees our familiarity as a step in the wrong direction for your healing. She doesn’t want you to rely solely on me for help.”

“But I trust you.”

“I know, Mylimasis, but there are many people in the world that would say I’m using my influence over you to force you into thinking or doing things you shouldn’t.”

“They think I’m stupid,” Will’s eyes were firery.

“No, they think you are in a vulnerable situation.”

“They think I’m weak!” Will spat, only to shrink a moment later, “They’re probably right… I’m not strong or smart… Or good.”

Hannibal grabbed the boy’s chin, “No, you are strong and quite intelligent. You have the lovely ability to cunningly manipulate people into getting what you want. I find myself amazed by your persuasive tendencies everyday– Even if it means I end up soaking wet in a pool.”

Will’s sorrowful expression broke into a smile that Hannibal cherished. To see Will happy was a true delight. He couldn’t stop himself from placing a kiss just below his right eye. He drew back, admiring Will pliant on his pillows, holding on to every word.

“And as for being good– you are like a beacon of light in the darkness. A lighthouse that stands tall even though waves are crashing all around it. You stand through it all, showing us lost in the waves how to return. You mustn’t let anyone take your character from you, especially not yourself. You are good.”

“Thank you, Hannibal.”

“It’s all true,” Hannibal nuzzled into Will’s neck.

Chapter 17

Beverly stood in Hannibal's kitchen, studying the pale looking kid sitting at the table. He seemed so small in real life. Like a sunken grave, wanting to collapse on itself. A shell of what could be.

She supposed he was probably scared of all the agents milling around Hannibal's home and was resorting to hiding inside his head. It was still strange though. She had seen him tear apart bodies. Studied it. Replayed it over and over until she had some of his murders memorized. Yet here he was daring to look weak and afraid.

"Hey," She walked up to him. Will looked startled. None of the agents had directly spoken to him. Tending to talk about him or speaking to Hannibal in lou of the kid. Hannibal was in the other room at the moment so Will was vulnerable by himself.

"Hey?" He greeted, nervously.

"I'm agent Katz."

"Oh, hi. I'm Will."

"I know, you're kinda the main event here."

Will blushed and ducked his head, "I know."

"You up for today?"

He nodded unconvincingly, "I think so."

"Just follow protocol and you'll be fine."

"I will… What's the protocol?"

Beverly smiled, she couldn't help it. He reminded her of her younger brothers. Taking a seat by Will, she explained "Basically, don't leave the shop until you're finished, don't cause a scene, and report anything strange.

Will nodded, his hands fidgeting in his lap. Beverly pulled out the small device that was in her pocket. She placed it on the table for Will to see. "This is a GPS device, you need to keep it in your pocket at all times, OK?"

"What does it do?"

"It pings your location to an FBI computer. We need to know where you are at all times."

"Will it hurt me if I leave the shop?" Will whispered, his eyes fixed on his hands in his lap.

Beverly frowned. She'd been briefed over Will's condition, including the fact Dolarhyde had locked a modified shock collar around Will's foot. The kid must be terrified of foreign electronic devices. She picked up the GPS tracker, it was about the size of a USB drive. She held it out to Will, "This is just a tracker. It can't hurt you, no matter what you do."

He still looked weary of the thing so Beverly tried to make it a game. "Watch this," She tossed the device in the air and caught it before it hit the table, "See? It's not gonna hurt you– you wanna try?"

She had seen Will play a similar game, albeit with knives, but at least it was a familiar motion. Will's mouth grew into a smile and he reached for the device.

"I bet I can throw it higher than you," Will stated smugly.

Bev grinned at him, her competitiveness showing, "Oh, yeah?"

"And catch it too," Will bragged.

"Let's see it then," Beverly leaned back in the chair crossing her arms.

Will looked around nervously before returning his gaze back to the device in his palm. His lips pressed thin, looking determined and focused. He tossed the tracker high in the air, far higher than Beverly had expected him to throw. She watched it begin to fall, but Will snatched it from the air before it hit the table. He grinned at her, his cheeky expression making her grin. She raised her hands in defeat, "Fine, you win."

He slipped the tracker in his pocket, smirking at her, "Thanks."

"No problem, kid, just remember to keep it on you at all times– Ok?"

"OK," He patted his pocket assuring himself the device was there. He glanced at Beverly, "Agent Katz, uh, do you think he's going to come and get me?"

Beverly studied the fidgeting teen closely. He was obviously nervous, but she couldn't bring herself to lie to him. "I don't think he's going to get you, but everyone is hoping he'll *try* to get you, so we can catch him."

Will nodded, staring at the ground, "Agent Katz, do you have a gun?"

Beverly answered slowly, "Yes, I have a government issued handgun."

Will's bright blue eyes met hers, they seemed to glow creepily, "You should keep it on you."

Hannibal walked up a moment later, "Will, are you ready to go?"

Will jumped up, taking Hannibal's hand. His momentary creepiness had gone from his demeanor. "Yes! Agent Katz gave me a GPS tracker. They can find me if anything happens."

Hannibal eyed her before nodding at Will. "Good. But nothing is going to happen."

Will smiled up at the older man, “I know, but just in case.”

Hannibal kissed the top of Will’s head before leading the kid out. Beverly shivered. He had been so normal for a few moments, but then his eyes turned strange. It was like another person had suddenly taken Will– replacing him with a cold presence. Was he warning her? Or was it a threat?

She checked her holster hidden under her jacket. The gun was resting as it always was, tucked between her arm and rib. She shook off the feeling of dread and stood. It was the kid's first day. The story hadn’t even been leaked. Nothing was going to happen. Not yet at least.

*

Nothing happened the first day to Will’s relief. They drove to the book shop in one of the FBI’s black vehicles. Hannibal walked him in and then turned him loose to the two women inside. Will followed their instructions to a T, not wanting to mess anything up on the first day.

They had put him on dusting duty in several of the back rooms, which desperately needed it. He worked hard wiping down surfaces and brushing off the collection of books. About an hour into his work, Yesira brought him water and an assortment of snacks. She made him put everything down and eat. Will realized as he snacked that this was less of a job and more of a place for him to be babysat.

The thought made him frustrated, but there was little he could do. He excused himself from the long rest and went back to work. He threw himself into working. He wanted to prove that he could do more than sit around and wait for the monster to turn up. He dusted all the shelves, removing the stacks of books to dust every inch of space. He lost track of time, so when Hannibal tapped him on the shoulder at the end of the day, he jumped. He hadn't realized he worked for so long. He went home exhausted and grimy, and spent a better part of an hour in the bath. He was still frustrated over the menial tasks and the rather childish placement he'd been forced into, but Hannibal let him sleep with him in his huge bed, so it made up for it.

The "leaked" story was released the next day. Freddy Lounds published it on her tattle crime website. Will was nervous the entire day. He kept staring at the doors and windows expecting Dolarhyde to burst through them at any moment.

But the monster didn't. In fact the shop was oddly quiet. Will only saw a few people shopping. Whenever they came into a room where he was working, he'd turn and leave. It was quiet and Will went home to Hannibal's happy.

The next day was not so.

When the black FBI van pulled up to the curb, Will could already see milling people on the street. He turned to Hannibal, who was always faithfully by his side, "There's people."

Hannibal was frowning, an expression that did nothing to eliminate Will's anxiety.

"Don't let them bother you. You do not have to speak to them if you don't wish to."

Hannibal helped him out of the vehicle, holding his hand as he walked Will up the front steps. People saw him and surged in close. Several cameras flashed and people pushed each other to get a look at the one who'd survived the roaming serial killer. Will shrunk at Hannibal's side. He wanted to disappear.

"Will Graham! How about a picture?" Someone yelled. Suddenly a chorus of voices were shouting.

"Tell us about the tooth fairy!"

"How did you survive?"

"Did you see any of his kills?"

"Where is he at now?"

Hannibal wrapped his arm around him and marched him through the crowd. Pushing through the curious onlookers. Will felt like he couldn't breath with all the sounds. People were pushing up against him. Bumping into him as Hannibal dragged him through the crowd.

"Hannibal…" he whimpered, hoping the man would save him from the crowd.

They made it to the door where Anna was waiting, she hustled them inside before stepping outside. She yelled at the crowd, "The store is closed– get off my property!"

She slammed the door closed and locked it. She huffed, "People these days!" Before stomping off into the house.

"I want to go home!" Will cried, seizing Hannibal's arm with both his hands.

Hannibal pulled him close, leading him to a sofa in the middle of the shop where there were no windows. "We will go home soon, we just have to wait a few hours here."

"I want Blue!" Will demanded once he was sat on the sofa. Hannibal knelt in front of him.

Hannibal cursed himself for not bringing the comfort animal. "Shh, darling, you'll have Blue later. You are ok. The people aren't going to hurt you."

"I don't want to be here! I want to go home!" Will yelled. His hands migrated to his head and he began to pull sharply at his hair, "I hate this! I want to go home!"

"Will, don't pull your hair, you'll hurt yourself."

Will dropped his hands from the sides of his head only to claw at his recently healed arms. Hannibal gripped Will's wrists, pushing the boy to lay on his back on the couch.

"No!" Will shrieked as he tried to rack his nails through his pale skin. "Let me go!"

"Will stop fighting!" Hannibal quickly moved, sitting beside Will's thrashing body. He held Will's arms down on either side of the boy's head, making sure Will couldn't claw himself. Will kicked wildly, but Hannibal's grip and some of his body weight held the boy down on the sofa.

Will's angry cries turned to pitiful tears as he tired of fighting.

"Please…Hannibal…"

Hannibal loosened his grip."Shh, mylimasis, you're safe. Calm down."

With his hands released, Will curled up, crying softly as Hannibal rubbed gentle circles on his back.

“Mylimasis…” Hannibal didn’t know what to say to comfort the boy. He kept up the gentle touches. Will eventually quieted. His breathing becoming easier, little sniffles sounding instead of sobs.

He was glad to see Will was pulling through his fit. When stressed induced panic attacks took him, Will’s brain reverted to an immature cognitive state. He’d become combative, petulant, and impatient. Like a child. He couldn’t follow logical sequences, so his ability to comprehend what Hannibal wanted was lost on him. When asked to not pull his hair, he had obeyed, but he hadn’t connected pulling his hair with hurting himself. Since Hannibal hadn’t directly told him not to hurt himself– in WIll’s mind he’d done exactly what Hannibal had told him.

Hannibal internally cursed himself for not being clearer. He ran his hand through Will’s curls. An apology on his lips, “I’m sorry, mylimasis.”

“Hannibal…”

“Yes, my darling?” Hannibal tried to see Will’s face, but the boy turned away, burying his head in the sofa back.

Will mumbled, “Why–Why are there so many people outside?”

“They’ve most likely found the article written about you. They want to see you.”

“Why?”

“People will never admit it, but they delight in other’s tragedies. They find it thrilling. You probably fascinate them.”

“That’s horrible,” Will sniffed.

“Yes, but they cannot do anything to you. You needn’t fear them,” Hannibal placed his hand on Will’s shoulder, “Look at me, mylimasis?”

Will hesitantly turned. His eyes drifted up Hannibal’s chest, neck, but didn’t dare go past his chin. He kept a steady eye on Hannibal’s lips, not wanting to meet the man’s eyes.

“There’s my brave Will,” Hannibal murmured softly, his hand brushing away Will’s tear damp hair. He really needed to give Will a hair cut, the teen’s locks were nearly to his shoulders. Will let out a contented sigh as Hannibal mused with his hair.

“Would you like a blanket?” Hannibal asked.

“No,” Will glanced over at the heavy stacks of books that still needed dusting, “I have to work.”

“The shop is closed– why don’t you rest? Your body isn’t used to the past couple days of hard labor. It would be good for you to rest,” Hannibal pointed out.

Will frowned, “I want to be helpful.”

“Will you be helpful if you’re exhausted?” Hannibal questioned.

“Fine, but I don’t want a blanket,” Will stated.

Hannibal conceded, “Alright, no blanket, but you’re resting.”

Will nodded, turning his gaze to the faded pattern on the couch. He traced the outline with his finger. Hannibal knew it was a way for the boy to quiet his mind. Will paused in the design, “Hannibal?”

“Yes?”

“What does m–mylimasis mean?” Will asked, pronouncing the name rather shyly.

“It’s Lithuanian, it means beloved one.”

“Oh.”

Will went back to tracing the pattern. His brow furrowed in thought. He paused again, “Why do you call me that?”

“Because that is who you are. You are beloved by me.”

“Oh,” Will felt his heart steadily pound faster.

"Rest, Will. Try to sleep."

But Will couldn't. Hannibal's words still rang in his ears. He was beloved by Hannibal? He couldn't stop thinking about it. He couldn't nap like Hannibal wanted him to, his mind distracted by this new revelation. He wasn't hungry. The only gnawing in him is that one that wanted to know exactly what Hannibal meant.

Could it be that Hannibal really loved him?

It was so odd and strange, the idea of someone loving him. Was it even possible? His father had tolerated him, his friends had included him, the dragon had dominated him, but none of

them had loved him. Did he even deserve love?

The day passed quickly with Will walking circles in his mind. He loved him? He loved him not? They left for home in the afternoon, the crowd had diminished. Only a few stragglers left. Hannibal warned them off with a terrifying glare, but Will didn't even notice. He was still lost in his mind.

Did Hannibal love him?

"I'm going to bed," Will announced softly when they arrived home. Hannibal gave him a concerned look but let him run upstairs. Will buried himself under his blankets, finally reunited with Blue under his arm.

Will tried to sleep, but he kept tossing and turning. The thoughts would not let his mind turn off. He had to do something. He shoved the blankets away and got up from bed. He matched himself down stairs where he could hear Hannibal working in the kitchen. He stood in the entrance of the kitchen staring at the man who said he loved him.

Hannibal noticed him, "Will?"

Will couldn't answer, his brain was desperately trying to form the words he wanted to say.

"Will, what's wrong?" Hannibal wiped his hands from cooking and walked over to the frozen boy.

"St–Stop," Will managed to stutter out. Hannibal paused a few steps away, waiting for Will. Will swallowed, feeling slightly nauseated. He rallied his courage, "I need to ask you something."

Hannibal tilted his head, curiously to the side.

"I need to know…" His hands fidgeted nervously by his sides..

Hannibal nodded encouragingly, "Yes, Will?"

Will's eyes were plastered to the ground unable to look up. "Please don't hate me."

"Will, I could never hate you," Hannibal wanted to sweep the boy onto his arms, but he stayed still, following what Will asked of him.

"I–I need to know," Will looked up through his lashes to Hannibal. His voice was timid and frightened, "Do you love me?"

Hannibal smiled softly, “Is that what you’ve been mulling in your mind all day?”

Will looked down at Hannibal’s shiny leather shoes, a curt nod in answer.

“Well,” Hannibal took a step closer, “Love is a difficult thing. It’s sent voyagers across stormy seas, it’s caused wars and famine, and has been said to be the wholeness of reality

itself. To define it is impossible. And yet we feel it anyway. Some of us more than others. I've only felt for a few people in my life, Will."

Will felt his heart begin to sink.

"But for you, I can say for certain that it is love– whatever love may be– that I feel for you."

Will raised his eyes to meet Hannibal's, surprised and confused all at the same time. "So, you do love me?"

Hannibal's smile grew at Will's confused furrow. He raised his hand and cupped Will's cheek, "Yes, mylimasis, I love you."

Will's face went through several changes: disbelief, shock, surprise, until it finally settled on pure joy. Will launched himself into Hannibal's arms. His arms wrapped around Hannibal's neck.

"Hannibal! Hannibal!" Was all the boy could say as he laughed and cried all at the same time.

Hannibal spun him around, before setting back down, he couldn't help but join in the boy's laughter, "Yes, Will, I love you."

It was like magic whenever Hannibal said it, little sparks flew about his stomach making him want to jump and shout. He felt like he could fly. If Hannibal loved him, he could do anything.

*

The black car pulled away from the other side of the street opposite the Book Nook. It drove lazily past the store, ever so slightly slowing, so the driver could stare into its vulnerable interior. It could easily be penetrated, if not for the watchful guards hidden in inconspicuous vehicles along the street.

Dolarhyde knew it was a risk to go so close to the FBI, but the Great Red Dragon was no coward.

He had heard the news, he had read the article. The shit-talking reporter had done what he'd ask: find Will. And find Will he did.

Dolarhyde watched from above in one of the nearby buildings as Will – *his Will* – entered the store. The boy was meant to be his, but there he was holding on to some other man. The Dragon snarled. He would not allow another to take his prize. He shaped Will into exactly what he was supposed to be. Will was *his* little dragon. The Dragon hissed. He would find a way to retrieve his little one.

Or, he'd make Will come back all on his own.

The thought grew in his mind, making the dragon grin. He'd remind his Will just who he belonged to and Will would come running back into his arms.

Chapter 18

The week continued on as the moon waxed larger and larger until it was full in the dark sky.

The crowds lost interest in Will and the store was reopened. Only a few stragglers attempted to bother Will, but Will didn't care. Hannibal loved him. With that power bounding in his veins, he walked and talked with more confidence than ever before.

As for Hannibal, he showered the boy with gifts. Will had new stuffed animals, a brand new phone, and reading glasses. Flowers and chocolate appeared everywhere. The older man fed him all his favorites creating great dinners for just the two of them. Will slept every night in Hannibal's bed. Tucked close to the man who loved him.

Being close to Hannibal proved somewhat difficult–especially in the mornings. Will would wake warm, wrapped in Hannibal's scent and to his confusion– incredibly hard.

Thankfully, Hannibal was never there, always gone off to prepare breakfast or to work in his study. Will threw the covers off and stared down at himself. He was tented uncomfortably against his sleep pants. Will groaned and covered his face with his hands. Why was this happening to him?

He didn't have to work at the bookstore today, and wanted to be lazy in bed, but his dick was determined to make him uncomfortable. He stayed still, willing it to go down, but before it could Will heard Hannibal's steps outside the door.

Will shot out of bed and rushed to the bathroom. He slammed the door just as Hannibal walked in.

"Will," Hannibal called from outside the door, "Everything alright?"

Will leaned against the door ensuring Hannibal wouldn't come in. He looked down once more at himself. Everything indeed was not right. Will took a shaky breath, "Yeah, I'm going to take a shower."

"Alright."

"Just don't come in!"

There was a pause. Will bit his lip. He shouldn't have said that.

"Are you sure you're alright?" Hannibal asked cautiously.

"Yes! I'm fine," Will squeezed his eyes closed, willing Hannibal to go away. There was a long pause and Will was sure Hannibal would come in.

"Breakfast is ready downstairs when you're ready."

"Thank you, Hannibal." He listened as Hannibal left the room. Will sighed, relieved.

He looked down once more, he was still incredibly hard. He looked away, determined to ignore it as he had for the past week. He turned the lock on the door and went to the shower He turned on the shower and stepped in.

Before the dragon, Will would have taken himself in hand, but now he was afraid of touching himself. Being with the dragon had made him fear his own bodily responses. If he had woken like this in the presence of the Dragon, it would have given the dragon just another reason to rape him.

*

"Little one" The dragon's voice woke him. The man's sweaty body was heavy against his own.

Will yawned, blinking his eyes awake, "Great dragon?"

"You're interested this morning."

Will woke quickly as he realized his dick was hard and pressing into the dragon's belly, who lay on top of him. The dragon shifted to the side. He gazed hungrily down at the boy's hard on.

Will gasped as a rough hand grabbed his member and stroked it. He shut his eyes as he felt his eyes water. He wished it felt bad, but it didn't. It wasn't like when the dragon fucked him. Will could almost believe the dragon cared for him. He shuddered as the dragon pulled at him once more. He groaned as pre-cum beaded on his head.

The dragon growled, "You like that, little one?"

Will whimpered in response.

"Something for you, something for me right?"

Will nodded as the dragon rolled him onto his side. The hand left his straining cock and reached under his knee, bending his top leg up to his panting chest.

The dragon closed in behind the boy, a dick digging into Will's ass. His arm wrapped around Will's waist, reaching down to grasp the boy's dick once more. There was no room for the dragon to stroke him, squashed between the monster and the mattress. The large hand just squeezed the member as Will ground his hips down trying to relieve the pressure.

Will felt the dragon's dick pushing at his abused hole. It was dry and Will knew it would hurt so badly without lube. He whined, a high pitch noise, "Please dragon–please have lube. I'll be so good for you! Please great dragon– please fuck me wet."

The dragon's hand moved quickly, grabbing the boy's balls and squeezing them painfully. Will yelped, "I'm sorry! I'm sorry!" immediately regretting begging for lube.

The dragon hummed pleased at Will's shouts of pain and released the boy. The hand returned to applying torturous pleasure on Will's length for a moment before leaving him again. The dragon reached over the boy's huddled frame to the bedside table.

Will froze, not sure if the Dragon was retrieving the belt or the lube. Will dared not look to see, staying completely still while the monster moved.

He heard a cap open and could have laughed in relief if not for the dragon pressing against him. He felt the cold drizzle of lube on his ass and fingers rubbing the cool substance against his puckered skin. A finger dipped inside, Will fought the urge to hiss and instead moaned, "Dragon…"

The man chuckled, his hot breath making Will sweat, "You love being fucked, don't you?"

Will groaned as the dragon put another finger in, scissoring him open.

"Beg for it," The dragon demanded.

"P–please–" Will shuddered.

The dragon jerked his fingers sharply. Will cried out in pain. Will could hear the dragon's sneer, "Not good enough."

"Please!" Will gasped, "Please I need it! Please fuck me! I'll be good for you, please fuck me, great dragon."

The Dragon growled pleased. The fingers were removed and Will heard the squelch of the lube as the dragon pumped at his own member. The head pressed against Will once more, this time thankfully wet with lube. Will gritted his teeth as the head pushed in. The dragon went slow but didn't stop until he was all the way seated. They both groaned as the dragon shifted over the boy.

"You want it?" The dragon growled in his ear.

Will did not want it. He felt overheated and trapped. The world was crushing in on him and he was pinned all alone. Yet the quicker the dragon started, the quicker it would be over. Will moaned the mechanical words that the dragon had taught him long ago, "Please fuck me, great dragon–I need to feel it. All of it– please!"

"That's right, little one."

The dragon moved then. Lazily fucking the boy into the mattress. Will's face was pressed against the old sheets as his body moved rhythmically from the dragon's thrusts. Soft "ah, ah, ah"s sounded from Will's lips as the man fucked him. His cock dragged against the rough sheets, pinned between his belly and the bed. Will groaned at the feeling, pressing his hips into the mattress as the Dragon pushed into him more roughly. Will ground his hips down, trying to chase after the good feeling that sometimes followed a release. He just needed a little more.

"Such a whore," the dragon panted as he began to move faster, "Always so hard for me."

"Please– more–" Will begged as the dragon rocked him down on the mattress. He just needed a bit more than it would feel good.

The dragon laughed as he began pounding in the boy, "Fucking whore– always wanting more."

The dragon shifted and Will felt pleasure shoot through his nerves. The dragon hit just the right spot. Will's thrusted against the rough sheets, giving him just enough stimulation. He cried out as he was pushed over the edge, making a mess of the sheets and plastering his stomach with sticky semen. He groaned in appreciation, the wonderful high of coming.

If only it stopped there. The Dragon did not stop. Intent on using Will for his own pleasure. The man continued to slam into the boy, using him like a toy, even though Will was wrung out and over stimulated. Will dug his fingers into the sheets, gritting his teeth as he waited for the Dragon to finish. Finally the monster was coming, spilling his hot seed inside Will.

Will wanted to get away from beneath the monster, but immediately chastised himself. He had wanted this to happen: it was his own fault. The dragon had only done what he wanted. He shouldn't have woken erect if he didn't want this. He should be grateful his mind told him.

"Thank you- great dragon!" Will's mind forced him to speak.

*

"Will!"

Will's eyes snapped open. His vision spun momentarily, he was confused by the fogginess all around him. He turned and realized he was in the shower, the heat from the water having bellowed steam into the air. He quickly shut off the water and stepped from the tub.

His erection was thankfully gone, but he was left confused. Had he cum in the shower? Or had it just gone away? The water spray had swept away any evidence if he had cum. Will covered his face with his hands. He didn't know which upset him more. That he couldn't remember or feel if he had cum or not, or that he might have cum thinking about the dragon.

He wanted to cry, but Hannibal called to him once more, "Will? Please answer me."

Will grabbed his robe that now hung in Hannibal's bathroom permanently. He forced his arms through the holes and tied the belt tight. He didn't want Hannibal to see his broken and confused body.

He turned the lock on the door and opened it. Hannibal stood right outside looking worried. The older man immediately assessed Will's demeanor.

"What happened?" He demanded.

Will shrugged, "Nothing."

Hannibal crossed his arms, "You were in there for over an hour. You weren't answering me."

Will pulled the robe tighter around his body, "Sorry."

"Did you lose time?"

Will didn't want to think about what happened in the bathroom. He side stepped Hannibal and walked quickly to the bed and picked up Blue.

Hannibal turned, he didn't look pleased. He repeated himself, "Will, did you lose time?"

Will squeezed Blue, "I dunno, I guess."

"Darling, you locked the door and were in the shower for an hour, you had me worried."

Will shrugged, "Sorry."

Hannibal frowned, "Will, it was dangerous. You could have slipped or fallen. How would I know if you're okay? I don't want you to lock the bathroom door."

Will felt his chest begin to restrict. What if Hannibal walked in on him while he was hard? His anxiety made his voice shake, "I just wanted some privacy, Hannibal. And I didn't fall so there's nothing to worry about."

Hannibal softened his voice sensing Will's distress. "I understand your desire for privacy, but this is about your health and safety, Will. Please don't use the lock in the bathroom."

Will's grip on Blue tightened, "It's not a big deal! I just want the door locked."

"Your safety is more important–"

"I want the door locked!" Will glared stubbornly.

"Will, it's rude to interrupt, please listen to what I'm trying to say–"

"I don't care!" Will yelled. He stomped his foot angrily, "I want the door locked!"

Hannibal raised an eyebrow at Will's sudden outburst. He took a breath willing himself to have patience with his rude charge.

"Why do you want the door locked?"

Will deflated. All the angry arrogance disappeared and he seemed to shrink at the question. "I dunno. I just don't want– I mean. I don't know…" Will shook his head deciding to stay quiet.

"Will," Hannibal sighed, he walked over to the bed and sat down patting the spot beside him, "Help me understand."

Will shuffled over to the bed, perching on the edge beside Hannibal.

"There you go darling, now can you try to tell me why you'd like the door locked."

"I–I don't want–" Will stared at his hands, "I don't want you to come in there."

Hannibal nodded, "I don't mean to invade your privacy, Will. You know this, yes? I just don't want you to hurt yourself."

Will felt his eyes water. All the emotions from the morning bubbling up. It all culminated to this: his body couldn't be trusted.

It was true. His body betrayed him. It never worked right. He always felt terrible. His heart would race for no reason. He would run out of breath too quickly. His brain would shut off while he was working and he could fall or trip. He felt sluggish all day. He still limped when he walked. Because the fact was, nothing ever good came from his body. It only made him hurt. And now he was getting hard for no reason.

Will felt disgusting. If Hannibal knew what his body did, he'd never want to touch him again. A small part of Will feared that Hannibal wouldn't be disgusted– that he'd actually like it. Like it like the dragon had liked it. Would Hannibal touch him like the dragon had?

Hannibal placed a hand of Will's shoulder, "Will–"

Will stood immediately, distancing himself from the man. Hannibal had said he loved him, but Hannibal only knew certain parts of him. Will didn't know if Hannibal would love all of him– the broken bits too.

"Please. Please don't touch me right now." Will ignored the hurt on Hannibal's face, "I think I need to be alone right now."

"Mylimasis, we need to talk," Hannibal prodded.

"I don't want to talk right now," Will glanced at Hannibal, desperately trying to apologize with his eyes, "Please, Hannibal?"

Hannibal looked like he might argue but he relented and stood, "If you need some time, that's fine. When you're ready there's food downstairs."

Will watched Hannibal leave, a terrible hate boiling inside. He hated himself. He hated his body. He wanted a new one, one that hadn't been abused and broken.

*

Will hid upstairs for the remainder of the morning, well into the afternoon, and still made no appearance late into the evening. Hannibal made lunch, but lunch quickly passed and the elusive boy still did not show. Dinner was now long passed by. Hannibal was impatient for Will to reveal himself. He wanted the boy to talk to him– not hide from him. But Hannibal would wait for the boy to speak first even if it meant waiting all night.

Hannibal had an inkling of what might have caused Will's behavior in the morning. He had woken to Will's body pressed tight to his own– Will had the tendency to lay on top of him as he slept. Hannibal could feel the boy's erection each morning. And each morning he removed himself, not wanting to upset Will. However, it seemed like avoiding the issue was not working in their favor.

Will hadn’t spoken much of the abuse he suffered at Dolarhyde’s hands, but it lingered all around him. Hannibal wished he could rid Will of the harsh memories, but they were a part of him now. He needed to learn how it made him stronger.

Hannibal heard the bedroom door open upstairs and quickly made himself look busy. He opened a book pretending to read as the mop of brown curls peaked in. Will stood hesitantly by the sitting room’s entrance before slipping into the room quietly. He settled himself on the edge of the couch. He didn’t say anything, just stayed huddled on the seat.

Hannibal set his book down, “Hello, Will.” Hannibal could see the slight tremor running through the boy. “Would you like some food, it’s past supper time.”

Will shook his head no.

“Would you like to talk about this morning?”

“Yeah,” Will said in a horse whisper.

Will stared down at his hands not speaking. Hannibal let the silence grow. Will opened his mouth as if to speak then promptly shut it. He squeezed his eyes shut.

Hannibal sighed, "Would it help if I told you I already know."

Will blinked at him surprised, "You do?"

"Bodily responses are completely natural, Will."

Will quickly looked away, his cheeks flushing bright red, "I-I didn't– I mean, It's not like–" Will covered his face, "There's something wrong with me."

Hannibal couldn't let Will struggle alone. The boy seemed too small by himself. He quickly moved beside the boy and pulled him into a hug. "There is nothing wrong with you."

"Yes there is!" Will cried, "I hate it! I don't want it to do those things anymore!"

"It's just a biological response, Will." Hannibal said softly.

"No, it’s not! It means– it means *something* . If I get hard it means I get fucked! It means I wanted it!"

The monster had made Will believe his own body was consenting to the rapes. Hannibal wished to tear Dolarhyde limb from limb for what he did to Will. Will’s physical wounds were healing fine, but the mental anguish was far from healed.

"No, darling. That is not true. An erection has nothing to do with your consent. If you didn't want it, that's it. You didn't want it."

"But I came, Hannibal!" Will wailed, tears sliding down his distraught face.

"That does not mean you wanted it." Hannibal assured him firmly.

Will looked up at him, his wide blue eyes full of fear and shame, "But it felt good– What if I liked it?"

Hannibal held him close, kissing the top of his head, "Then you were trying to make a horrible thing bearable."

"Was it horrible?" Will asked pitifully.

"Yes Will. What was done to you was horrible and wrong. You should never have been through that." Hannibal assured him. He wished he could remove all the pain Will had suffered. He wanted to shelter him from every trouble.

"It's my fault though– isn't it? The dragon wanted me? If I was different maybe he wouldn't have done those things. I mean– if my cock didn't get hard maybe he wouldn't have done it– Right?"

"Will, it would have mattered little if you responded or not. Dolarhyde would have taken what he wanted."

"But I came! And in the shower– I was hard and then I started thinking about him fucking me and then I woke up and it– it was gone," Will confessed, "What if I came thinking about him? What if I actually did want it?"

"Have you heard of Stockholm Syndrome?

Will wiped his face with the back of his hand, tears and snot making a mess of his complexion. "No," He answered, his voice wavering.

"It's when a kidnapped person develops empathy for his captor. This syndrome causes them to have fondness or even love their captors– even though the captors are hurting them. You've been told you have an empathy disorder, yes?"

Will nodded.

"Stockholm combined with your empathy would make you very confused. You were doing your best to stay alive with that monster– even if it meant tricking your brain into liking it or even wanting him to use you."

"Am I sick?"

"No, darling. You just get confused. But you won't always be that way. You'll learn what makes you happy– emotionally and sexually."

"I don't want sex!" Will spat vehemently.

"That is a perfectly fine choice. You don't have to have sex." Hannibal agreed softly, "But there are other things that make you happy. And make you feel more like the Will you are. I know you like warm blankets, playing with your dogs, reading late, and eating lots and lots of sweets," Hannibal flicked Will's nose affectionately, "When you are feeling unsure about yourself, you should try to think about what makes you happy."

Will blinked hesitantly, “So I don’t have to have sex? I should just do what makes me happy?”

“Yes, mylimasis. And if sex is something that makes you unhappy, you shouldn’t do it. Maybe, one day when you are confident, you can try, but for now, you shouldn’t.”

“What if– What if I get hard again?” Will asked fearfully.

“It’s nothing to be afraid of Will,” Hannibal soothed, “If you have an erection– which is an entirely normal bodily function– you can take care of it or simply wait for it to go down.”

“I can’t– I can’t touch myself.” Will whispered.

“That’s okay, Will,” Hannibal calmed, “You know you are safe here, you can wait until it goes away on its own. No one will touch you.”

Will nodded, sinking into Hannibal’s side as he finally began to relax. Hannibal decided to broach the topic before it was lost, “Would you like to sleep on your own now? Or would you prefer to continue sleeping with me? I have no preference Will, I just want you to be comfortable.”

Will did not want to leave Hannibal. The thought of being separated from the older man, sent fresh waves of fear through him, “I want to stay with you.”

“And what would you like me to do, if you become hard? Would you like me to ignore it? Or, leave the room?”

“I– I don’t know…You won’t– You won’t touch me, right?”

“I would never touch you like that without your permission,” Hannibal assured.

“You can stay– just, don’t say anything or look at it – Ok?” Will asked softly.

“I promise, Will,” Hannibal kissed the top of Will’s head, “Thank you for trusting me, mylimasis.”

Will snuggled closer, “I’m sorry for scaring you this morning. I won’t lock the door.”

“You have nothing to apologize for, I’m just glad you are ok, and we’ve talked about it.”

That was when a heavy knocking pounded at the front door. The couple jumped in surprise. The noise brought a fresh batch of tears to Will’s eyes, while Hannibal sat up alert. Hannibal patted the couch, gently pushing Will to rest his head, “Will stay here, I’ll see who it is.”

“Don’t go,” Will begged, even as he obediently laid down.

“Shh, I’ll be right back,” Hannibal leaned down and kissed Will’s cheek before quickly rising for the door. All his senses were on high alert as he approached the door silently. No friend would be at the door at this hour. Hannibal slipped a small blade up his sleeve– ready to strike if it was Dolarhyde at the door.

He glanced out the spyhole and huffed in annoyance. Crawford stood outside the door. Hannibal swung open the door not hiding his displeased growl, “What do you want, Jack?”

Jack's mouth twitched in equal annoyance. He scowled, “The boy. There’s been another murder.”

Chapter 19

It was dark and far too late in the night to be traveling. Hannibal wanted to strangle Crawford for dragging Will out. The boy was emotionally exhausted from the day. His body wrung out from the stress. He hadn't even eaten. Will was drained and now this.

Jack Crawford sat in the front of the SUV while another agent Hannibal didn't recognize drove down the dark highway. Will and Hannibal occupied the backseats. The moment Hannibal had told him they were leaving, Will had latched onto him and refused to let go. Even now, Will slumped on Hannibal's side, his hands fisting Hannibal's shirt possessively. The roll of the vehicle had rocked Will asleep. The boy's head rested on Hannibal's chest. A bit of drool pooled at his lips. Hannibal ran a hand through Will's hair ensuring Will was asleep. He then glared at the director, "Why are you bringing Will to a crime scene?"

"It's Dolarhyde. But I need to be sure. Will can confirm." Jack spoke without looking behind him. His gaze stayed on the road ahead.

"You don't need him to confirm– look for Dolarhyde's signatures."

"It's different." Jack answered gruffly.

"What do you mean?" Hannibal asked sharply.

"I think it's a message. Will may be able to interpret this kill."

Hannibal tightened his hold on Will. He wanted to shelter Will from Dolarhyde's horrors. If anyone should be filling his mind with blood and death– it should be Hannibal. He wanted to purge the dragon from the boy's mind. Yet he had no power to stop the FBI director from using Will. If Jack put his mind to it, there was no protecting Will.

Still Hannibal tried rallying to Will's defense, "Have you spoken to Alana about this?"

"It's late, she'll be informed in the morning."

"She would not allow this."

Jack's eyes flickered ever so quickly up to the mirror to look back at the duo before answering, "Dr. Bloom understands the importance of catching Dolarhyde."

Hannibal met his eyes with an intense stare, "And she knows the risks of allowing Will into this investigation. She wouldn't stand for this."

Jack looked away, "Dr. Bloom works for me. As do you. I'm making this call."

Hannibal opened his mouth to retort, but the car was pulling into a drive. Emergency vehicles' lights flashed all around. To Hannibal's immense displeasure, they'd arrived at the scene.

*

Hannibal moved to climb out of the car, startling Will awake. Will cried out, desperately clinging to Hannibal. His brain went through a series of thoughts. *Hannibal is safe. Hannibal protects me. Why is Hannibal leaving?*

“Mylimasis, we have to get up,” Hannibal murmured softly. He covered Will’s hands which were death gripping his shirt and jacket, “It’s ok, Will.”

Will relaxed, his mind still foggy from sleep began waking up. He allowed himself to be guided from the car, holding on to Hannibal as they stepped into the chilly night air. He looked around for the first time. The red and white lights were blinding as he tried to observe the scene. They were in front of a regular looking house along a country road. There were police and EMT milling around the property. The lights made crooked and menacing shadows dance on the lawn. Each one was like a new nightmare. Will shuddered by Hannibal’s side. He felt terribly frightened and dread filled the pit of his stomach. He wanted to be sick.

Jack Crawford appeared by them. His looming presence doing nothing to comfort Will. Will hid behind Hannibal’s tall frame.

“Will,” Jack called him curtly, “Come here.”

Will trembled but did as the man asked, stepping out from behind Hannibal and presenting himself for the director. He kept his gaze on his shoes that were pinching his toes uncomfortably.

“There’s been a murder,” Jack spoke again, “We need to know if it’s Dolarhyde– you understand?”

Will felt his stomach drop. The dragon was here? He’d killed again? Why were they out in the open? Why weren't they hiding?

“Do you understand,” Jack snapped impatiently.

Will nodded quickly.

“Repeat what I just asked you.”

“You need to know if it’s the d–dragon," Will stuttered back.

“Good," Jack reached forward and grabbed Will's arms, "Now come on."

Will flinched as the man grabbed him, he looked to Hannibal for help. Hannibal gave him a tight smile, "Let's go, Will."

Jack held up a hand, "You're not coming."

Will's eyes flew to Hannibal's, but the older man did not meet his eyes; he stared sternly at the agent. Will looked back and forth between the men, Crawford's grip tightened on his arm.

"Jack, he needs someone in there with him." Hannibal said slowly, his voice laced in anger that Will had not heard before.

"He doesn't need you. He'll view the scene unbiased." Jack waved an agent over, "See that Dr. Lecter stays out here." A large burly agent stepped towards their group.

"Hannibal?" Will whispered, his heart racing.

"It'll be alright," Hannibal assured him before turning once more to the director, "Jack, you can't be seriously considering taking him in there alone."

"He will be fine," Jack yanked on Will's arm, making him stumble away from Hannibal's safe presence. Will looked imploringly at Hannibal begging the older man to save him.

Hannibal stepped towards him, but an agent stepped between them, "Dr. Lecter, we have a waiting area over here," the agent placated.

Hannibal tried to step past the agent but the man grabbed his arm, "I really must insist Dr. Lecter–"

"He can't go in there alone!" Hannibal yelled furiously at Crawford, ignoring the agent.

"He's agreed to assist with capturing Dolarhyde – add this to the list of his duties." Jack shouted back as he dragged Will along with him. Will struggled for a moment not wanting to go with the man but Crawford's grip never ceased. It was pointless to fight the larger man. Will stumbled after Jack, as he was dragged towards the house.

"It's going to be ok, Will!" Hannibal shouted desperately from behind him.

Will didn't believe him. Will wanted Hannibal to kill that agent. Snap the man's neck for daring to step between them. Why wasn't Hannibal saving him?

Will couldn't process what was happening. Before he knew it, he was hauled into the house. Immediately the stench of blood hit him. The metallic tinge of iron, heavy in the air. There was death here.

He was led past a wall of family photos. All smiling faces greeted him from picture frames as Jack dragged him down the corridor. Jack paused by a door, he turned to Will. Will shrunk under his gaze.

"I want you to look at the scene. Then I need you to tell me what it means. Got it?"

Will nodded, though not understanding.

"Don't touch anything in there– just look, " Jack warned as he swung open the door.

It was a bedroom. The master, with a huge king sized bed laid with rich velvet comforters and pillows. But that was not what Will saw first.

No, his eyes stayed glued on the ground. His gaze traveled along the trail of red. It was like a path, smeared on the floor boards. It went from the doorway into the room. Will tentatively stepped into the room, following the blood.

His heart raced and his mind reeled at the suffocating stench of blood.

The trail ended at the foot of the bed, or at least it traveled up the bed, but Will didn't dare shift his gaze from the ground. Whatever was on the bed would frighten him. A voice called from behind him. He managed to look back, Jack was speaking to an agent. He waved impatiently at Will, “Look at it, I’ll be right back.”

Will swallowed hard, but Jack disappeared. Will slowly turned, forcing his eyes up to the bed.

The body was knelt on the edge of the bed before a great bloody mural. Its head, with familiar and distinctive dark curls, was bent forward. The forehead pressed on the sheets. Its arms spread before it. It was worshiping the great dragon– or the great mangled mess of bodies before it.

Will summoned his courage and stepped closer. The gory mess was the mangled figures of the family. Their deaths fated because one of them looked like Will. They could not be distinguished, twisted and broken together as they were.

Will edged closer, his curiosity peaked. He reached out and touched some blonde hair belonging to some unfortunate human being. He lifted it revealing a face, the eyes removed and replaced with shards of mirror. Will drew back, letting the hair fall back over the face.

He went to the kneeling body– the only one not mangled. He pushed gently against its shoulder. It fell to the side listlessly. It looked very much like him– except the eyes were gone but no mirrors were inserted in the gaping holes. He looked about for them, wondering where the dragon had dropped them after clawing them out of the man. Will’s eyes landed on the body’s hands. The arms were reaching towards the pile of dismembered parts, but the fingers were closed tight. *He must be holding something* , Will thought. He reached out, prying the stiff fingers apart. The man was holding his own eyes.

Will gently picked up the organs. The soft flesh was wet with blood. He rolled the ligament in his palm. His fingers stained red with each touch. He placed the eyes back into the man's hands. Forcing the stiff muscles made close around his precious objects once more. Eyes, to see and understand.

Will understood.

Will had given the dragon the most precious thing he could. His understanding. His ability to empathize with the monster. Everyone else in the world could not, their eyes could not comprehend. They had to be replaced with something to see the dragon. A mirror to reflect the dragon.

Will stepped back, his fingers tinged red, hanging limp at his sides. The blood was pounding too loud in his ears– he didn’t hear the door open.

Suddenly a hand grabbed him by the shoulder. He froze in terror. The dragon's breath on his neck

"Do you like it, little one?"

Will's trembling body answered. The dragon was there, just behind him. A cold hand circled his waist. His chest heaved as his breath grew ragged. The dragon would take him.

"No," He whispered, he couldn't allow the dragon to steal him.

"What?" A new voice sounded.

Will jolted, surprised. He turned to look– it wasn't the dragon, it was Jack Crawford– standing just a few paces back. Will looked wildly around, his hands flying to his head frantically– Where had the dragon gone?

Jack snarled, as he spotted Will's bloody hands, "You touched the crime scene!"

Will blinked dumbly at the agent. Hadn't the dragon just been there? Will blinked and his breath caught– there was the dragon. Sneering at him just where Jack stood a moment ago. What was happening? Was Jack there or the dragon? Were Will's eyes playing tricks? Jack stepped forward– No– it was the dragon– wasn't it?

The dragon lunged towards him.

"No!" Will screamed. He spun away from the dragon, tripping over his own feet and falling clumsily on the floor.

The dragon– No, Jack?-- stared for a moment, their frown becoming increasingly more of a scowl. Jack spoke but his voice sounded like the dragons, "Get over here, little one!"

"No!" Will yelled, scrambling backwards through the filth on the floor, "You can't take me!"

The dragon sneered, "Yes, you are coming with me, Will."

The man's hands were suddenly on him. Pulling him to his feet. Will twisted and writhed, screaming, "No! You can't have me! No!"

"Will stop fighting!" Jack's voice boomed.

But it wasn't Jack, was it? The teeth were grinning like the dragon's. Will could feel the monster's nails biting into his skin. It had to be the dragon! Will wrenched his arm away.

"No! Don't touch me!" Will clawed at the dragon. Lashing out with his hands digging his nails into the monster. He could feel skin breaking under his hands, the rush of blood across the dragon's skin, but the dragon just snarled and grabbed him once more.

"You think you can hurt me, little dragon?" The dragon laughed as he forced Will to the ground.

Will screamed and kicked with all his might, but the man's heavyweight dug into his shoulder blades and he was pinned to the spot.

"You'll never be free, little one," the dragon whispered in his ear.

"H–Hann– Hannibal!!" Will screamed. Maybe the man would hear him? Maybe he'd save him again? He tried to scream again, but his vision was swarming with strange shadows. He tried to breathe but the dragon was too heavy. He couldn't get air. It all went dark.

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Will didn't quite know when the darkness left him, but he knew it was painfully bright when he blinked his eyes open. His head pounded.

"Will?" A voice asked, "Can you hear us, Will?"

Will's vision came into focus as he blinked awake. "Dr. Bloom?" Will murmured, his voice horse.

Alana smiled at him kindly, "Yes, it's me. How are you feeling, Will?"

"I feel dizzy," Will answered, his words coming out slightly slurred. His head really did hurt. He knew he was laying down in some sort of bed, but it wasn't very comfortable– not like Hannibal's.

"That would be the medicine," A new voice explained.

Will frowned as a strange suited figure sat down beside Alana. He had clothes like Hannibal– a suit jacket and waistcoat– but he wasn't Hannibal. Why was he mimicking Hannibal? And more importantly, why wasn't Hannibal there? Will felt the question rise before he could stop himself, "Hannibal?"

Alana and the new man glanced at each other. The man smiled sympathetically, "No, I'm afraid you have me today. I'm Dr. Frederick Chilton. I'll be your new psychologist, Will."

Will frowned. Hannibal was his doctor, not this new man. He made a displeased grunt and repeated himself with more effect, "Hannibal?"

He felt Alana's hand cover his own, "Hannibal's here. But we need to talk to you before you see him, OK?"

Will tried to jerk his hand away, but found he couldn't move it. He glanced down at his hands, only for a momentary painful flash of white.

"Try not to move too much," the new doctor chided.

Will forced his eyes open to look down. There was a cloth band around his wrist. He gave his arm another tentative tug. As he suspected, the band held him still. He slumped his head back, only for another hot white flash, he moaned in pain. Why did his head hurt so much? And why was he tied to the bed?

“You hit your head several times on the ground, when you were,” Alana cleared her throat, looking for the right words, “removed you from the situation. You have a concussion,” Alana informed him. “Do you remember what happened?”

Will groaned, closing his eyes. All he wanted was to sleep– specifically in Hannibal’s big soft bed with the man himself on top of him. But Dr. Bloom was demanding he speak before seeing Hannibal, so he thought back with effort.

They had left home with Jack. And then Jack took him in the house– And there had been so many bodies– And the dragon was there! Will remembered suddenly– the cold hands on him, the hot breath on his neck, the voice that said he’d never be free. He began to panic.

“The dragon!” He gasped.

Chilton looked almost excited, “What about the dragon, Will?”

“He was there! He tried to get me.” Will whispered.

Alana frowned, “He was there? What do you mean, Will?”

“He grabbed me– he told me I had to come with him. I didn’t want to! I fought him– but he got on top of me– oh god, did he rape me again? I don’t remember!” Will cried out.

Alana leaned closer, taking his hand once more, “No, Will. Nothing happened. You weren’t raped. Dolarhyde wasn’t there.”

“What?” WIll sputtered.

“Will,” Chilton leaned back in his chair writing notes, “You are under the impression, Dolarhyde– or the “dragon” as you like to call him– was at the house tonight?”

Will looked aghast between the two doctors, “Yes! He was there! He grabbed me!”

Chilton just raised his eyebrows and made a note, while Alana looked at him with pity. Will’s eyes darted frantically between the two doctors. He spoke hesitantly trying to believe his own words, “He was there. I saw him.”

I saw him. Didn’t I?

Alana sighed, “Why don’t you tell us what happened?”

“Yes, please enlighten us– don’t leave anything out,” Dr. Chilton added to Will’s annoyance.

Will scowled. He wanted Hannibal and he wanted out of these bindings. If talking made it go faster, he’d suffer through it, “We went to a crime scene. It was really late. Hannibal made me get out of the car and then Mr. Crawford wanted me to go into the house with him. He wouldn’t let Hannibal come with us,” Will added in a whimper.

“Did that make you angry, Will?” Chilton prodded, his eyes gleaming with some strange hunger.

“N-no,” Will stuttered.

Alana shot Chilton a withering look before smiling tight lipped at him, “It’s OK, go on.”

Will swallowed, “We went into the house and Mr. Crawford took me to this room. It had a bunch of blood everywhere– and there were bodies.”

“Can you describe it for us?” Chilton asked.

“There were bodies on the bed, but they were all not together– like chopped up. Except one. It was strange.”

“Why was it strange,” Alana asked gently. She was stroking his hand which Will wasn’t sure was comforting him or infuriating him more.

He shifted uneasily, “It looked like me. He had the hair and a similar face– and his eyes– his eyes–”

Will stared vacantly, recalling the small organs rolling in his palm. He remembered the blue, just like his own eyes. He could almost imagine it was him laying on that bed, prostrate in front of the dragon. Giving up his sight to gaze at the dragon forever.

“Will, you need to stay focused,” Chilton snapped, “What about his eyes?”

“Cut–they were cut out. Like he was giving them to the dragon,” Will continued quickly.

“What? What do you mean giving them to the dragon?” Chilton asked impatiently.

Will glared at the doctor, wasn’t it obvious? Will huffed, “They were in his hands– he was obviously worshiping the dragon, and in his fucking devotation he gave his eyes to the dragon!” Will snapped. He pulled harshly at his restraints, “Why am I tied down!?”

“It’s for your safety, Will,” Alana said calmly.

Will hissed in pain as he tried to yank his hand through the tight strap. It dug into his wrist and bit at his thumb. “I want out!” Will yelled.

“You’ll be released when you’ve calmed down,” Chilton explained.

“I am calm!” Will snarled.

“Obviously, not,” Chilton said smugly, which made Will want to stab the man, but he settled on a burning glare. Chilton continued–unphased by Will’s death glare, “Now, why eyes? Why was he giving his eyes to Dolarhyde?”

“So he could see him!” Will answered impatiently, he turned and pleaded to Alana, “Please, Dr. Bloom, can I get up? Please?”

“Just a few more questions, OK?” Alana said gently, “Why were all the other eyes cut out if he wants to be seen?”

“They can see him, but they won’t understand. Only I can see him and understand. He wants me. He wants me to see him and know him. And–and to worship what I see.” Will tried to explain.

“So, you're saying that display was for you?” Chilton asked.

Will rolled his eyes. This doctor was such an idiot. “Yes, he wants me to go back. Nobody else will understand. And he doesn’t just want it– he demands it. He’s just going to keep killing more and more until he gets me back. He’s going to try and take me if he can– just like he tried today!”

“Will, Dolarhyde was not at the crime scene,” Alana explained.

“But he grabbed me! He spoke to me!” Will insisted.

Alana rubbed circles on his hand that Will decided he hated. He balled his fists to get her to stop.She stopped with a sigh, “The only person in the room with you was Jack.”

“No!” Will demanded, “I fought back– he tried to get me but I scratched him! I didn’t let him take me!”

Alana was looking at him with more pity which made him furious. He tried sitting up only to find he was more secured to the bed than he originally thought. He yelled in frustration, “I want out! I want Hannibal!”

Chilton stood up– towering over him. He immediately quieted, the threat of the bigger man overwhelming his anger. Well, not overwhelming, more like pausing it for a moment; he was still very angry.

“You attack Jack Crawford,” Chilton said seriously, though Will could tell he was very pleased with how he’d scared Will into submission. *What a bastard* .

“I didn’t attack Mr. Crawford!” Will hissed. Though now that he thought it over, the dragon’s voice had sounded a bit like Jack’s. And Jack had seemed to appear in his vision where the dragon had stood. Will shook his head, he had seen what he’d seen, “It was the dragon.”

Chilton reached his hand down and placed his clammy palm on Will’s forehead. Will snarled and twisted his head, snapping his teeth where Chilton’s hand had just rested. Thankfully for the doctor, he’d pulled his hand back just in time.

Chilton looked a bit shaky, “Your forehead is hot.”

“Don’t touch me!” Will spat.

“You’re running a temperature,” He turned to Alana who was looking a little pale, “I suggest he stays overnight if not longer. With behaviors like that, we may want to look at an institution. Might I suggest my own hospital? He’d receive the proper treatment and therapy.”

“I don’t want to stay!” Will interjected, “Where’s Hannibal?”

“Hannibal is in the lobby waiting for you to calm down,” Chilton scolded, “But seeing as you are refusing to behave properly, you’ll have to wait the rest of the night to see him.”

“No!” Will yelled, he could see Chilton was just punishing him for trying to bite him. There was a cold gleam in the man’s eyes. He enjoyed having power. “I want to see Hannibal now! He’ll understand! I need to see him!”

“Maybe tomorrow, Will,” Alana said softly.

He felt his heart sink as she took the psychologist’s side. He thrashed in his binds finding that his legs were also tied down, “No! No! No!”

“Nurse,” Chilton called, “Please give him another dosage. He’s hysteric and needs rest.”

Will screamed when the nurse approached with a syringe, “No– Please! I just want Hannibal!”

“A full dosage, please,” Dr. Chilton instructed the nurse without another glance towards Will, “We don’t want him waking during the night.”

“Please– No!” Will begged, but the nurse was already sliding the needle prick into his arm. “I don’t want it, please,” Will sobbed. Alana was rubbing his hand again and Chilton was making notes. Will hated them. His last thought before drifting off into a dreamless sleep was how lovely they’d both look with their throats slit.

Chapter 20

Hannibal suffered impatiently. He sat stiffly in the uncomfortable hospital chairs, surrounded by a multitude of sick and helpless people. He hated it. The smell of sweat and urine permeated the space– as it does when a large number of humans were enclosed in a small space. The hospital waiting room was one such place.

Hannibal was an ER doctor, so he knew the smell quite well, but he was never forced to sit amongst the muck and ramble. No, he was the angel of death. He passed judgment over the meager beings. By his hand they were delivered or thrown to the depths of hades. It seemed he had been demoted from judge to defendant as he waited for Will's prognosis.

When Will had been dragged away from him, Hannibal immediately called Alana. He awoke her and informed her of the situation. She was not pleased and agreed to meet him at the scene.

Unfortunately, she didn't make it in time. Will was carried unconscious from the house in a stretcher followed by Jack who was bleeding heavily from a gash on his face. The director had refused to speak to Hannibal and instead was driven to the hospital. Hannibal had been worried for a moment before he saw Will's hands covered in blood that was not his own. Hannibal couldn't stop himself from smiling privately to himself, *atta boy, Will* .

Was it a smart move attacking Jack? Probably not, but Hannibal thought it very just. He was refused access to the ambulance, so he followed along in an agent's car, he called Alana once more informing her of the situation.

When he arrived it seemed Jack was determined to keep Hannibal away from Will, the hospital staff barred him from going to see the boy. He was stuck in purgatory waiting for news.

Alana entered, her lavender scent mixed with an edge of nerves announced her presence. He was surprised to see her coming from the hospital rooms. He couldn't help but feel slightly enraged that *she* had been allowed access to Will but not him.

"Alana," Hannibal stood and greeted Alana. They hadn't spoken in person since their argument over dinner. It was obvious they both seemed weary of each other.

"Hannibal, we're about to meet with Jack."

"How is Will?"

Alana winced at his tone, "He's sleeping. He's also delirious. He's convinced Dolarhyde attacked him at the house."

"What?" He was taken aback. He assumed Will had attacked Jack to attack Jack, but it seemed there was another story.

"That's what he said. He could be lying but I doubt it. The stress of seeing the crime scene pushed him to his limit."

"He should have never been there," Hannibal said vehemently.

Alana nodded, "I agree. There was the possibility he would snap if stressed and he did. Jack should have known better."

They stood in silent agreement for a moment. Alana pulled her sweater closer, crossing her arms, “He asked for you.”

Hannibal knew she was studying him for his response. Challenging him to react. She obviously still felt their relationship was inappropriate.

“What did you tell him?” Hannibal asked, trying to inquire covertly what she would do in their meeting with Jack.

“That he could see you when he wakes up,” Alana answered. Her voice failed to reveal whether or not she was happy with the arrangement.

“Then I will be there,” Hannibal answered simply.

Alana’s eyes narrowed but she turned, gesturing down the hall, "Let's go to Jack."

Hannibal nodded and followed her down the hospital hallway. They arrived at Jack's room, who was attempting to drive the doctor away from his bandaged neck. It seemed Will had racked his nails down from just below the man's ear, down his neck, and across his chest. Though not deep, it drew blood and left quite a mark. Hannibal was impressed.

"Enough," Jack threw up his hands at the doctor, "I'm fine."

The presiding doctor made an unconvinced sound but left the room. Jack sighed and rolled his shoulders testing his mobility. He grunted in pain as he pulled at the wound.

"How are you feeling, Jack?" Alana asked.

"It's just a scratch. He was swinging so wildly, it was just a matter of staying out of the way," He gestured at his neck, "This was just my slow reaction. He surprised me."

"It's hardly surprising, given you dragged a PTSD victim into this situation. " Hannibal grumbled. Although he didn't grumble, it was more like a rumble.

Jack waved him off, "There was no way we would have known he'd lash out."

“Did we not watch the same videos?” Hannibal questioned, keeping his voice sounding reasonable.

Alana crossed her arms, “There was always the possibility he’d fall back into his old ways.”

Jack sighed looking between the two psychologists, "I miscalculated."

Hannibal wanted to argue more, but Jack's admission was probably the best he would get. He nodded graciously to the director, “Thus far, Will has recovered incredibly well. It has obviously been easy to forget his situation: Will is a victim. I believe tonight shows he needs careful handling especially in regards to Dolarhyde’s murders.”

“I agree,” a new voice spoke. Hannibal turned and was greeted by a man a bit older than him. The man reached out his hand, “Dr. Frederick Chilton. A psychologist assisting in the FBI’s investigation.”

Hannibal took the man’s offered hand, “Dr. Hannibal Lecter, I don’t believe we’ve met.”

Chilton grinned, “No, I was recently invited on the case by Dr. Bloom. I work as the director of the Baltimore Hospital for the Criminally Insane. You must pardon me, but I’m not quite sure of your place in the investigation?”

“I’m a psychologist,” Hannibal didn’t mention the fact, he had just entered the field. No point in giving this weasel looking man any leverage, “I’ve been assisting in finding Dolarhyde, and recently looking after the FBI’s ward, Will Graham.”

Chilton’s eyes seemed to gleam with hunger at the mention of Will, “Will Graham, such a curious person. Irreparably damaged unfortunately, but curious nonetheless.”

Hannibal buried his snarl. How dare this man insinuate Will was shattered. Hannibal could see the beauty of Will’s becoming. He could be made anew– the boy was not a lost cause. “Will is far from being irreparably damaged. He is simply traumatized and scared.”

“He attacked Agent Crawford,” Chilton critiqued, “And just now, he tried to bite me and threw such a fit he had to be medically sedated. It’s my recommendation he be removed from the general populace and institutionalized at the BHCI.”

Hannibal raised a brow several thoughts crossing his mind at once. Another, *atta boy* , for attempting to bite the disagreeable doctor. He was proud of his Will for standing up for himself. A spark of anger at hearing Will had been sedated, such things were not needed if they had patience with the boy. The last, a tendril of unease at Chilton’s mention of the BHCI. He would not allow his Will to be institutionalized. Will was staying with him.

Hannibal was about to tell Chilton just that when Jack spoke, “We’ll discuss this later once Will wakes. Hannibal, evaluate his health and report back in the morning. Alana, Chilton, I want you to stay and tell me what Will said before he was sedated.”

Hannibal knew he was dismissed. He desperately wanted to see Will, but a part of him knew the remaining three would be discussing Will’s possible relocation. For the first time in a long while, Hannibal felt dread. He was going to lose Will.

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Will came to with a cool cloth wiping his brow. He moaned pitifully. He knew it sounded pitiful and he did it again for full effect.

“Will?” Hannibal’s accented voice called to him.

Will struggled to open his eyes, wanting to see Hannibal. “Hannibal?”

“Yes, mylimasis. You’re in the hospital.”

Ah. Maybe that’s why he felt cold sweat rolling from his pores trying to cool his hot skin. He thought it would be a good time to moan again, at least to gain further sympathy. He did.

“Oh, darling. Can you open your eyes? You should really drink something.”

Will obeyed but not until he had moaned some more and rolled his face to the side– hoping to look as tragic as possible. He cracked his eyes, smiling inwardly as he was met by Hannibal's overwhelmingly concerned eyes. He sighed happily.

"There's my brave Will," Hannibal murmured fondly as he stroked Will's damp curls. He brought a cup with a straw to his lips, "Drink, Will."

Will obediently closed his lips around the straw, lazily slurping the cool water. He sighed contentedly and smiled softly, it felt like all his muscles were sore and his head hurt so badly. Even lifting the corners of his mouth was difficult.

"I want to go home," Will whispered. Speaking in a low raspy voice, hoping Hannibal would find it endearing.

Hannibal's eyes dilated with something terribly possessive. Hannibal’s eyes were so overwhelming Will quickly looked away; cursing as he did so, as his head pounded with the effort. He whimpered in pain.

"We will go home soon," Hannibal said softly.

Will nodded and drew his arms to his chest. Partly because he felt a sudden cold flash but mainly to see if he was restrained. He was not, but his hand brushed by the hard straps still attached to the bed. He shivered, "I don't like being tied up."

Hannibal had immediately released Will’s bonds when he found the boy, a fresh wave of anger over Will’s mistreatment. He pulled the hospital blanket up and tucked the fabric around him. "You should never have been restrained."

Will hummed in agreement. Once Hannibal finished messing with his bedding, the man sat back staring absently at Will. Will imagined there were dark thoughts running through Hannibal's mind.

"Is Mr. Crawford, OK? Dr. Bloom said I hurt him."

"He's fine," Hannibal waved, "It's you I'm concerned about."

"I really thought it was the dragon. He spoke to me and everything," Will squeezed his eyes shut, trying to block out the man's word. *You'll never be free, little one* . His head hurt thinking about it. In fact it hurt thinking about anything.

"It wasn't him though, was it?" Hannibal's hand brushed Will's face, Will pushed against the hand, loving Hannibal's touch.

"No," Will answered softly.

"You're very warm, Will," Hannibal noted, his touch turning clinical as he felt Will's forehead with his hand before moving away to take Will's charts.

Will pouted at the loss of contact. He grumbled, "I'm cold." To emphasize that fact he curled up on the bed, dragging the blanket up around his shoulders and head. It would be wonderful to fall asleep cocooned in warmth.

Hannibal frowned, still checking Will's chart. He placed it back in the holder at the end of the bed before taking a device from one of the cabinets. He brought it near Will, "Open your mouth, Will. I'm going to take your temperature."

Will glanced at the strange device, before opening his mouth and allowing Hannibal to place the cold thing in his mouth.

“Close your mouth, keep it under your tongue,” Hannibal ordered, holding Will’s chin gently.

Will made a pleased hum, nuzzling face towards Hannibal’s hand. Hannibal’s hands felt so good and the way he handled Will with gentle firmness had butterflies dancing deliriously in Will’s stomach.

The device beeped and Hannibal drew it from his mouth. He looked at it, while stroking Will’s cheek. His eyebrow raised. “Your fever is 104.”

“Is that bad?” Will asked, his mind felt so heavy and tired.

“It’s high, I’m surprised you’re awake.” Hannibal leaned down, kissing Will’s forehead softly. His lips felt so warm, Will shivered with delight.

Hannibal breathed in deeply, smelling the boy. There was a sickly sweet scent mingled with the boy’s. Hannibal drew in a deep breath curious as to what strange scent lingered on Will. It wasn’t blood. It wasn’t Crawford. It smelled rotten. It smelled like an infection. Like a disease–

Hannibal drew back worryingly running his hand over Will’s hot brow. The boy moaned pitifully. His eyes were firmly shut and Hannibal feared he might have passed out.

“Will?” He asked. Will did not stir.

Hannibal quickly called the preceding doctor. Double checking the teen’s temperature, the doctor called in a team of nurses who set up his IV drip and stripped the sweat soaked bed.

After a few hours they had managed to bring Will’s fever down to a manageable 101. Hannibal demanded they conduct a MRI, so Will was carted off to the MRI unconscious and unaware. When the scans returned, the doctor looked at Hannibal with surprise, “His brain is inflamed.”

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“He has encephalitis,” Hannibal informed the group. Jack looked quite unhappy, Alana distressed, and Fredrick Chilton looked annoyingly pleased.

“That would explain his far-fetched stories,” The man dared to laugh.

Hannibal fought the urge to not snap the doctor’s neck. Instead he smiled at him, with more teeth than was necessary, “His version of seeing the Dolarhyde was real to him, seeing how his brain was on fire and he was hallucinating. So yes, however “far-fetched” they may have seemed, it was his truth.”

“How long for his recovery?” Jack asked, drawing them back to the point.

“He’s on medication, his fever has gone down, and he should make a full recovery within a few weeks.”

“How much of that will be in the hospital?”

“He’s stabilized. I would give him a few days before discussing his dismissal from hospital care.” Hannibal said, his voice tight. He could already tell Jack would not listen to him.

“He needs to be out there. The dragon is close. He knows Will’s alive and in Baltimore. We need to lure him closer.”

"I don't think Will is in the right mind to be assisting with this investigation,” Alana said, crossing her legs as she spoke.

Hannibal nodded, "I agree."

"As do I," Chilton pipped in. Hannibal frowned at him. Chilton just smiled, "I believe he would be much better suited in my hospital."

Hannibal raised an eyebrow, "Your glorified prison?"

"The BHCI would provide full time support to all Will's health needs. He could be transferred there today."

"No," Hannibal answered immediately.

"The BHCI would also be willing to provide hands-on support for any extra *field trips* the FBI may need to take Will on." Chilton said amiably, "Of course with the additional security, Will would never cause anyone harm again."

"The Baltimore Hospital for the Criminally Insane is not the place for Will Graham." Hannibal frowned.

"Hannibal, this could be a potential long term solution for Will," Alana pleaded.

"The BHCI is not the solution. Will has a disease, he is not insane. And his only crimes are being cleared. As long as he helps the FBI, he is not guilty."

"This is not a matter of innocence or guilt, Dr. Lecter," Chilton interrupted, "We must assure Will is cared for and that he isn't hurting anyone."

“Will was brought into a stressful situation without support while suffering from a debilitating brain disease. He would not hurt anyone if he had the necessary support. He has only been out of captivity for several weeks. He is still terrified,” Hannibal turned to Jack, “I know we don’t agree on everything in regards to Will, but if you allow me to work with him, he could be back assisting the FBI in a few days.”

Hannibal would rather sweep Will away to Florence or possibly the Moroccan coast where the fresh mediterranean air and lazy sunny afternoons could heal the boy’s body and spirit. But alas, Will was under the FBI’s thumb, his every move scrutinized. Hannibal had to stay on the FBI’s– Jack Crawford’s– good side. It meant risking WIll’s health and safety, but it would keep the boy safe under his protection.

Frederick made an unhappy sound, “The BHCI would be the best option here. We can provide top of the line medical attention and ensure he complies with the FBI statutes. Surely, you cannot be considering placing Mr. Graham back into Hannibal’s care after,” Chilton gestured at Jack’s bandaged neck, “Mr. Graham’s episode.”

Crawford frowned at Frederick, “This was my own fault. I don’t blame Will or Hannibal.”

Frederick stuttered an apology, “I didn’t– that is to say– I never meant–”

Jack raised a hand quitting the fumbling doctor, “It doesn’t matter. I want Will back out in two days. Hannibal will be his main guardian. I also want him out alone. Dolarhyde is biding his time to act, why not give him ample opportunities?”

Hannibal could think of a hundred reasons why that would be a bad idea, but he stayed quiet. He didn’t want to risk losing Will.

Alana cleared her throat, “I for one, think this is a terrible idea. I don’t want Will in the field and I don’t want Hannibal to be his guardian.”

Hannibal could feel the snarl forming on his face, he shoved it down and stared blankly at his mentor. She met his stare with a piercing one of her own.

“Why?” Hannibal asked levelly.

“Over the past few weeks, I’ve observed Will developing an overly dependent relationship with you, Hannibal. He relies on you far too much. It is hurting Will. When he woke up, his first instinct was to ask for Hannibal rather than for help or question where he was.”

“He is asking for help when he asks for me. I've been providing for him. I'm sure he would call for you if you were actually there for him," Hannibal said evenly, trying to keep the venom from his voice.

Alana huffed, "I have been there for him– but he is being manipulated. Your relationship with him is not appropriate. Hugging and kissing a patient?"

"As I explained before, Alana, he is relearning social cues– that a touch can be a touch and not mean pain. A kiss on the forehead is not a means of getting sex, but of endearment. Surely you would agree he needs people in his life that he feels safe–"

"You are not that person, Hannibal!"

"He has no one else!"

"Then he should leave–"

"Enough!" Jack yelled, silencing their squabble, "Will stays with Hannibal. They obviously have a … connection. Will is more likely to cooperate with Hannibal than without. Be that as it may," Jack turned to Hannibal, glaring at him pointedly, "If Will so much as breathes of another episode, he'll go to the BHCI."

Hannibal nodded seriously, "He won't."

Chapter 21

Will didn't understand the seriousness of the situation. He didn't comprehend the severity of the disease he battled. Though he now had medication, it could still easily cause him to seize or hallucinate. Likewise, he didn't understand the fine line he and Hannibal were walking with the FBI. The gravity of what would happen if Will acted out in a single way.

No.

Will was just happy.

Will practically jumped with giddiness as he was wheeled out of the hospital to Hannibal's awaiting car. When they arrive back at Hannibal's house, Will immediately ran about the house re-exploring the whole place as if it were completely different from when they were there just two days prior.

Hannibal sighed, running a hand through his hair. While Will seemed to have boundless energy, Hannibal was weary. He had spent his free time researching and preparing documents for Will and his departure. If anything went sideways, they would need to leave. It was a matter of safety for Will. Hannibal would not see him locked under the weasel Chilton's thumb.

The best option, though, would be the capture of Dolarhyde. If the serial killer was caught– or preferably killed– it would mean Will would be free from the FBI's obligation. Hannibal knew Dolarhyde was close, he wanted to butcher the monster himself. Yet that would require finding him and that would mean leaving Will. Hannibal hated the thought of being separated from Will for any length of time.

Arms circled his waist, breaking his concentration. Will pressed against his back, his face buried in Hannibal's shoulder blades, "You're tense."

Hannibal rested his hands atop Will's stroking the boy's slender fingers, "Yes. You had me worried."

Will snorted, "I feel fine now."

Hannibal turned so he could face Will, pulling the boy's head up to look at him. His eyes were still rimmed red and his face far too pale. Hannibal sighed, brushing his fingers along Will's cheek, "You should eat something and take your medicine."

Will pouted, "I'm tired, I want to sleep."

Hannibal arched an eyebrow. Hannibal had just heard the boy practically gallop up the stairs. Hannibal knew Will didn't want to take the medication. Any sort of drug made him anxious. "The medicine will help you, Will. Encephalitis is dangerous if left untreated."

They had been over this hundred times, but it did little to ease Will's fears.

“Well, I’m not hungry,” Will said, cocking his head to the side and looking quite pleased with himself. He knew he couldn’t have the pills on an empty stomach.

Hannibal sighed taking Will’s face gingerly with both hands, “Mylimasis, you must eat and heal. Please darling.”

Hannibal managed to keep Will’s blue eyed gaze for several seconds before the boy looked away. His cheeks flushed with heat, Will muttered a defeated, “Fine,” before turning away sulkily.

“Thank you, Mylimasis.”

Hannibal pulled him into a hug. Breathing deeply as he checked for developing signs of the illness.Will had probably contracted the disease while he was with Dolarhyde. He had lived in filth. It had grown disproportionately, until the stress of the crime scene and disease pushed him over the edge. Hannibal nosed Will’s curls. Thankfully, the sickly sweet scent was faint and the natural earthy scent of Will was far more prevalent. Hannibal assured himself Will was recovering.

Hannibal guided Will to the dining room. Will slouched in what was now his chair, seated to the right of the head of the table. Will liked when they sat there. Hannibal was right next to him, he could reach out and take Will’s hand or add more delicious food onto his plate. It felt easy.

Will really hadn't realized how foggy his mind had been. It was like he'd been living in a haze. His mental capacities were limited to his basic needs: eat, sleep, stay alive. Hannibal had said that encephalitis would make him hallucinate. He wondered if all that he saw was actually a dream or if things he had experienced actually happened.

He tried to think back to when Hannibal had rescued him from the house. He had told the man he smelled of blood. Will swore he had seen the darkness swirling around the man’s head like an evil halo. But the danger of the man starkly contrasted the way the man held him so gently. The way Hannibal cared for him and fed him. How could he have thought Hannibal was corrupt, when the man loved him? It must have been a dream.

Will took a bite of the food. Hannibal was watching him looking pleased that Will was eating. Hannibal didn't look dangerous here. Neither did he smell like blood. Will was beginning to think the blood he smelled had been his own blood.

Then there was the conversation in Hannibal's bed. Hannibal had explained Will was afraid of being forced to kill. Will could see his point, he was terrified the Dragon would take him again and make him do those horrible things to the screaming people. But he assumed the dream was more his own fear of losing the people that had finally shown him kindness. He’d finally had a taste of the good life where he was loved and protected. He did not want to lose that.

He looked up. Hannibal had finished and was taking his plate. They met eyes and smiled at each other. Hannibal brushed his shoulder lightly as he passed. Will’s eyes followed him as

he disappeared into the kitchen. *God,* how had he ended up with someone so absolutely perfect?

His gut twisted– the day in the hospital when Hannibal had taken him by the throat. Had that been his imagination?

Hannibal's hand had wrapped around his neck. His grip was so certain and steady. Had the man really wished to kill him? Will had tipped his head back. Letting the man hold his neck. *Make it fast.* He had said. Did Hannibal actually think about killing him? Or did Will hallucinate the way Hannibal tensed, his grip tightening as he prepared to twist Will's neck sharply?

A hand grasped his neck. Will snapped to attention, Hannibal's warm fingers massaging his tightening neck muscles.

"Did you get enough to eat, Will?"

Will stayed stock still, too scared to break Hannibal's eery grip. "Yes, Hannibal. Thank you." Will whispered.

Hannibal's hands paused, sensing the boy's shift in demeanor. "Are you alright, Will?"

"Yes sir," Will's voice quavered. He could feel his body trembling– did Hannibal actually want to kill him?

Hannibal's hands left his neck, but Will couldn't bring himself to turn and look at the man.

"Will…" Warm steady hands covered his cold shaking ones. Hannibal was kneeling beside him. Looking imploringly at him, but Will kept his focus on his plate.

"Darling what's the matter?"

"Nothing." Will managed to say.

"Will, tell me what's wrong?"

Will opened his mouth to only snap it closed. How was he supposed to tell Hannibal? He wanted to confide in the man, but what if Hannibal changed? What if the darkness was suddenly aimed at him?

"I'm just nervous," Will lied, not meeting Hannibal's inquiring eyes.

Hannibal frowned in acquiescence. He squeezed Will's hands, hoping to convey comfort, "You are so brave Will."

He placed the boy's pills beside his half empty plate. Will stared at them. He considered not taking them. But Hannibal wanted him to so he slowly took each one silently. Popping them into his mouth and swallowing them dry. Hannibal didn't move from the floor until he'd taken them all.

Once he finished Hannibal rose, kissing the top of Will's head, "Good boy."

Will couldn't help but smile at the praise. Hearing those words was always a good thing. He managed to look up at the older man. He couldn't see anything sinister in the way Hannibal looked at him. Perhaps his mind was going crazy? Maybe his intuition was wrong. He wanted it to be wrong.

*

Jack Crawford came over later in the evening. Hannibal showed him into the parlor where Will was nervously sitting on the couch, watching the director intently. He had slept in the afternoon. Will had developed a low grade fever which had Hannibal fretting. He'd given Will more medicine that made the boy drowsy. He'd slept most the day and woke with a better temperature. Still Hannibal kept him bundled in blankets on the couch.

"Thank you, Hannibal," Crawford said as Hannibal took his coat.

"I've been meaning to have you over as a guest, Jack. It's a pity you didn't arrive sooner. We might have had you for dinner," Hannibal said politely, ever the host. He disappeared for a moment with the director's coat, leaving Jack standing admiring Hannibal's lavish living room.

Jack smiled awkwardly at Will, "How are you, Will?"

Will swallowed hard, he could see the bandages now on Crawford's neck. "I'm sorry for hurting you sir. I don't remember doing that, I'm so sorry sir."

Jack raised an eyebrow. The director glanced at Hannibal who re-entered the room. Hannibal's eyes betrayed nothing. Jack sighed, tersely waving the boy off, "I'm fine, Will. Trust me I've seen worse."

Will didn't seem to believe him but he stayed quiet, looking petrified. He shoved his hands under his thighs, trying not to claw at his arms to cope. He rocked slightly back and forth. Hannibal strode over to his liquor cabinet.

"Wine?" He asked Jack. Pulling out an expensive bottle.

Jack eyed it hungrily, "Of course."

Hannibal poured two wine glasses. He handed Jack his glass of wine. He poured Will a glass of juice, and placed it on the table in front of him instead of handing it to the boy. Hannibal found no reason to interrupt Will's stemming as it calmed him.

Jack slipped his wine. He made a pleased sound, "This is quite good, may I ask the variety?"

"Venetian. 1996. Do you know your wines?"

"Enough to enjoy what I'm drinking, thank you Dr. Lecter."

Hannibal nodded, "Anytime, my wine cellar is full, but not often pursued except by myself. I'm happy to share with good company."

"I’m afraid my company may become sour. We need to discuss tomorrow."

"Will's return." Hannibal agreed simply. Will continued to rock himself, his eyes glassed. Perhaps the fever had returned?

"Will?" Hannibal tried calling the kid, but Will seemed lost.

"Does he do this often?" Jack asked with a raised brow.

“He often loses time. It is a symptom of encephalitis and only increases when he’s overwhelmed. The rocking is a form of self calming.”

“He's on the spectrum,” Jack surmised.

“His traits align more with autistics than sociopathic, if that’s what you're wondering,” Hannibal chided. He walked over to Will and gently touched his shoulder. Will jumped looking at Hannibal worriedly. The conversation was completely lost on him. Hannibal brushed the boy’s hair from his eyes, running comforting fingers along his scalp. Will hummed in appreciation an leaned into the touch. Hannibal smiled at his sweet boy, “Will, Jack wants to discuss tomorrow.”

Will’s eyes widened with fear but he nodded all the same, I’m listening, sir.”

“You’re doing well, Will,” Hannibal encouraged as he sat down beside him. Jack sat across from them, putting his wine glass down.

“You’re going to return to the bookstore but not tomorrow, Will,” Jack said, “We want you to spend more time out where Dolarhyde can see you. So, we’ve enrolled you in several college classes.”

Will’s eyes were like saucers, “I’m going to college?”

“Yes. You’ll attend several classes while appearing to be alone.”

“Alone?” Will whispered worriedly.

Hannibal wrapped his arm around him. Will leaned into the embrace overwhelmed and terrified at the same time.

“Don’t worry,” Jack said, “We will have several agents on campus as well as an undercover student in all your classes. You won’t be alone.”

“Thank you sir,” Will managed before turning into Hannibal’s chest. Exhausted he stayed there being rocked while Hannibal and Jack continued to discuss details.

*

After Jack had left in the evening, Hannibal had taken Will upstairs to the older man's room. He had made sure Will had Blue tucked in his arms and a weighted blanket covering him before going over what the next day would look like. He patiently repeated every detail and made sure Will could tell him back everything. ONce he was sure Will understood, he rewarded the boy with lots of forehead kisses and "Good boy"s. Will curled up, tucked into the man's chest, and slept best he could.

In the morning, Will dressed himself, attempting to appear older than he felt. He wore a nice button up, obsessively running his hands over the front of his shirt, smoothing the wrinkles over and over. The khakis Hannibal had gotten him were soft and not stiff. He couldn't stand the idea of wearing closed-toed shoes, so he rolled on his plushy socks and slipped them into sandals. If Will ignored the socks and sandals, he could half believe he looked like a college student.

The undercover agent turned out to be Beverly Katz. Will was happy to see it was her. She was kind to him and seemed to have a sense of humor. Beverly arrived wearing street clothes. She had two backpacks slung over her shoulder. She shrugged one of them off and handed it to Will.

"Here, kid, nobody should go to college without a backpack. Also, here's your lanyard and ID. Freshmen staple."

Will looped the lanyard round his neck, "Thank you, agent Katz."

"Call me Bev. And it's no problem, I've been dying for a reason to get out of the lab."

Will shifted nervously foot to foot. He wanted to stem but forced himself to still. College students didn't do *that* , his mind told him. He worried his lip with his teeth, "Have you been to college?"

"Yup undergrad and graduate."

"Do you think I'll be ok?"

"What do you mean? You'll be great." Beverly smiled kindly.

Will's face reddened with shame and he looked down, "I just haven't been in school for a while. I barely finished the book Dr. Abayomi gave me."

"These are basic classes you won't fail," Beverly comforted, "Plus, I don't think Hannibal would let you fail."

"No?" Will glanced up surprised.

"Nah. You got yourself a personal tutor."

"Path to valedictorian, I expect nothing less," Hannibal said, as he entered, carrying a lunch box.

"That's a lot to ask," Will grumbled but took the lunch box. Hannibal straightened the backpack, acting like a fussy mother hen, until Will shied away.

"We should probably escape before he makes you do first day photos," Beverly whispered.

Will paled, "No pictures."

"I wouldn't dare," Hannibal placed his hand on Will's shoulder squeezing it lightly. He turned to Agent Katz, “I’ll take him to the car, would you give us a moment?”

Beverly nodded and left. Hannibal turned back to his charge, "Now, do you have your phone?"

Will held it up. Hannibal nodded his approval, "And you have the GPS?"

Will slid the phone back in his pocket and produced the little tracker, "Right here."

"Good," Hannibal couldn't stop himself from adjusting Will's backpack once more, before lightly kissing his forehead, "I want you to be safe and have fun."

“I’m scared,” Will whispered. He was not ready for this. He wanted to stay with Hannibal. He wanted him to hold him so tightly he couldn’t move. So he never had to worry. All he’d have to do was trust Hannibal. He pushed his way into Hannibal’s arms. The older man immediately embraced him tightly.

“It’s alright, baby.” Hannibal breathed into his curls, rocking him gently, “I’ll be waiting for you as soon as you’re finished. Then I’ll make you whatever you want to eat. And you can eat in bed with Blue. Beignets in bed. How would you like that?”

Will nodded, sniffling as a few tears escaped. He was scared, but he wanted to make Hannibal proud. He blinked the tears away, “O-Okay.”

“Good boy.” Hannibal praised as he guided Will out to the awaiting agents.

*

Hannibal didn't need to kill anyone, but he wanted to. He was frustrated that all his efforts to keep Will safe were for naught. So Hannibal left right after Will. The FBI were hovering over Will, and agent Katz was watching over him. Will would be safe. And rather conveniently the center of their attention. They were so focused on Will they didn't even see the ripper walking amongst them. It was annoyingly easy to be a serial killer to say the least.

Hannibal drove several miles, parked in a seedy part of town and waited by the back door of a strip club. The next unfortunate person who walked out the door was pounced on.

The rather large greasy man was placed in a chokehold and brought to his knees within seconds. Hannibal held him in a choke hold as the man thrashed in his grip, but there was no escape. The man elbowed and clawed, but his efforts were in vain, and his face turned red and then purple. His desperate attempts became weaker and weaker.

Hannibal released the man, his body fell to the ground. The man gasped for air, clutching at his throat. Hannibal kicked the man's side, the man rolled easily over, struggling to focus as Hannibal stepped over him and lowered himself into a crouch over the man.

He placed his gloved hands around the man's neck and began to squeeze. The man lost consciousness almost immediately, his eyes rolling back, without life to them.

Hannibal stood bushing the dirt from his suit. He quickly went to his car and took a scalpel and a cooler. He returned to his victim, pulling the man's shirt up. He carefully made an incision just under the man's rib cage. With the cut made, he quickly pulled the man's flesh apart and cut out the man's kidneys. He placed them in the cooler. He removed his gloves into the cooler, wiped the blood from his forearms with a towel which he also stored in the cool. He then dragged the man's body over to a dumpster and hauled the dead body inside. He covered the man's remains with trash until his victim was hidden. By the time the body was found, rats would be feasting, and much of the evidence would already be destroyed.

Hannibal plucked up the cooler and pulled out his phone.

I hope you're having a good day. I'm making dinner when you come home. Hannibal texted.

He'd make a special dinner for Will's return.

Chapter 22

Will developed a pounding headache in the middle of class.

He wanted to lay his head down, but everytime his head started to droop Bev would kick him lightly in the shin. So much for sleeping through class.

College was like every other class he'd been in except the teacher lectured a lot more and there were no disruptive students. Nobody started screaming at other students and the teacher– professor– didn't seem to care that half the students were on their phones. Will truly did try to pay attention, but the professor was talking in such broad and elaborate terms that Will didn't understand. He attempted to take notes but gave up halfway through when he saw Beverly just scanning the room instead of listening.

After sitting through two painfully dull and incomprehensible lectures, Will was exhausted and ready to be finished, but the FBI was determined to wear him out.

"Ready to go?" Beverly asked lightly. Everyone else in the class had left, leaving them alone in the empty lecture hall.

"Can we go home?" Will grumbled.

"Nope," Beverly shrugged, "Crawford wants you to walk to the bookstore."

"Walk?!" Will gasped. He felt dead on his feet though he'd been sitting the whole day.

"We're not that far. I'll be with you the whole time. Then you can eat lunch."

"I don't want lunch, I want to go home!" Will said stubbornly.

Beverly crossed her arms, not looking impressed, "Well, home isn't an option right now, so come on."

He huffed but stood slugging his backpack over his shoulders. There were so many people outside the classroom as they exited. Everyone was rushing by to get to where they needed to go. Will grabbed Bev's arm, clinging to her as she wove through the crowd. They made it outside. Much to Will's surprise his body didn't shut down as they went through the doors. He was much too relieved to be away from the bustling student body. But he didn't let go of Beverly either.

Beverly scanned the area before moving.

"What are you looking for?" Will asked, still holding her arm in a vice grip.

"Oh you know, I'm a big bird watcher," Beverly said sarcastically.

Will rolled his eyes, "I know who you're looking for. But *what* do you look for?"

Beverly shot him a curious glance, before moving at a brisk pace, "Well, I look for suspicious vehicles, people lingering a bit too long, and things that just seem off."

Will nodded along though he didn't really know what she meant. He wanted more concrete objects to look for. Like a flag waving that said "He's right here", or maybe a large neon arrow that pointed at the dragon.

They walked along the side walk towards the shop, Beverly scanning as they went. She suddenly stopped short, "Well that's definitely off putting."

Will looked up. Blocking their path was a fiery redhead: Freddie Lounds. He shrunk back hiding behind Beverly.

"Will!" Freddie waved with false cheer, "Care to comment on your most recent murders?"

"Miss Lounds let us pass." Beverly ordered. Freddie grinned, crossing her arms, and clearly not moving from her spot.

"Sure, but first, I need to know what it was like to see all those bodies. Do you miss it, Will? Killing people?"

Will squeezed his eyes closed praying the journalist would disappear.

"Is that a yes? You want to kill again don't you? You've been trained to kill–"

"Excuse us Miss Lounds, we need to get by," Beverly grabbed Will by the arm and began dragging him past the reporter. Will's body obeyed immediately.

"I just want Mr. Graham to answer. He knows he's dangerous. It's odd that the FBI can't see that. Why is he out on a college campus and not locked up is beyond me.

"You are disrupting a federal investigation. Move aside," Beverly barked when the reporter jumped again in their path.

Freddie raised her eyebrow, "An investigation? The FBI thinks Dolarhyde is on a college campus? Knowing him, I don't think he'd waste his time."

Beverly narrowed her eyes,"Knowing him? Miss Lounds, if you have any pertinent information on Dolarhyde, you must reveal it to the FBI."

"Oh I have plenty, but I have to say, you're sitting on the jackpot." She nodded towards Will, "Get him talking and he could tell you where the dragon is."

Will gapped at her, angry and confused, "I don't know where he is!"

Freddie's face turned to contempt. "I'm sure you do, little dragon."

Will stiffened at her words. No one called him that except the dragon. Why would she say that? How dare she say that. He frowned, snapping, "I don't know where he is!"

Freddie laughed, aggravating his already frayed nerves, "It's ok, little dragon, I'm sure you'll run back to him as soon as the FBI isn't watching."

Will snarled, “Go to hell!”

Beverly grabbed his arm and forcibly dragged him away from the reporter. He could hear Freddie's laughter and the click of a camera shutter. He wanted to turn and rip out her tongue for saying such things. When they had gotten a good block from her, Beverly spun him around, looking furious, “What was that?”

He jerked away from her. "She called me that name!"

"I don't care what she called you, you don't act like that.”

“Like what?”

“Like you could hurt someone.”

Will felt like his head was going to explode. He had wanted to hurt her. It felt right to hurt her, but Beverly's grip on his arm told him he shouldn't. It felt like two people were fighting for control over his mind. One felt particularly strong.

“I hate her.”

Beverly sighed, “Yeah, me too, kid, but that doesn't mean you get to act like you're going to lunge at her.”

Will stared at his feet, in his sandals and socks. HIs clothes felt uncomfortable. It seemed like everything was just too tight and was about to spring out. Like his body was coiled so tightly trying to keep everything together. He was one Lounds away from snapping. He tried to calm himself. He whispered softly, almost to himself, “I could kill her. It wouldn't be hard.”

Beverly grabbed him by the shoulders, "Will, you cannot say things like that."

Will wrenched from her grip. "I could! I could cut out her tongue,” He pleaded with Beverly to understand, “She'd never say those things about me."

“It’s not right, Will.”

Will looked down, feeling ashamed, “I’m sorry.”

“It’s OK,” Beverly sighed, giving him one final look of pity before taking his hand, “Come on. Let’s go.”

*

Will was angry and upset the rest of the afternoon. The Abayomi's had been delighted he was back. They both worried over him, asking if the medicine was working and if the hospital was caring for him. Will nodded mutely along with them. There was no point in telling them the truth. He'd attacked the FBI director at a crime scene, he'd been restrained at the hospital,

and now he was going to college, something the Will from before had always dreamed about, but now something Will dreaded.

Yesira immediately sensed his distress. She shooed away her chatty wife and quickly found him a quiet place to sit alone. A quiet room with an old love seat. She even grabbed large blankets for him.

"Do you want me to call Hannibal?" She asked kindly.

Will considered it. Hannibal would rescue him in an instant. However, he couldn't help replaying the odd versions of Hannibal in his head. The one that was cold and calculating. The one that held his neck as if to snap it. What if he'd feel Hannibal's fingers wrap around his neck? What if the man just had enough of Will?

Will pulled the heavy quilt around him. "No. I'm ok, just tired."

She felt his forehead, Will flinched at the touch. She frowned, "Oh honey, you're burning up. Did you take your medicine this morning?"

Will couldn't remember. The morning had been a blur of activity and stress. He shrugged the blanket tighter around himself.

Yesira sighed, "I'm going to call Hannibal."

"No, please," Will grabbed her hand, "Please, he'll be here soon anyway. Don't bother him."

"Will…"

"Please?"

She gave him an inquisitive look but relented, "Ok, but you're resting here. Don't even think about working." She tucked him into the couch.

"I won't. Thank you, Yesira." He whispered as she left.

Will burrowed under the warm blankets to wait. He was good at waiting. He did nothing but wait for years. A little more never hurt.

*

Hannibal arrived at the bookstore. The kidneys were sitting warm under a platter at home. Waiting to be covered in a sweet honey pomegranate sauce that Hannibal knew Will would love.

Yesira met him at the door, worry sketched on her brow.

“What’s wrong?" he asked immediately.

“Will,” Yesera answered, “He came in absolutely exhausted, he’s running a temperature, but asked me not to call you.”

Hannibal frowned, “Where is he?”

“I think he’s sleeping, but agent Katz wanted to talk to you before you left, she is just down the hall.”

Hannibal thanked the nurse and quickly went down the hall. Beverly had to have an answer. “Agent Katz,” Hannibal greeted as soon as he spotted her.

She turned, arms crossed unhappily, “Hannibal, Will is about two steps from getting thrown into prison. You have got to get him to settle down”

Her abruptness made him pause, “What happened?”

“We ran into Freddie Lounds. I don’t know how she knew we’d be walking that way, but she did. She started antagonizing him, he got riled up.”

“Did he attack her?” Hannibal asked immediately, although he knew if Will had, this would not be the conversation they’d be having. Will would be locked up.

“Nope, but he might have, he said he wanted to cut out her tongue,” Beverly said seriously, “I practically dragged him away from her.”

Hannibal kept his features calm. He wished he had witnessed it. Oh, to see his boy angry and vengeful. Hannibal couldn’t help wanting to see Will’s killer side emerge, but it had to be done carefully. Hannibal would not allow Will to disappear into a cage for experimenting with his dark urges. No, they needed to be protected, fostered, and developed.

“What triggered it?” Hannibal asked. Last time Will spoke to Lounds he was left sobbing. Hannibal wondered what she said to anger him.

“You can ask him, but she accused him of knowing where Dolarhyde is and she also called him ‘Little Dragon’. Will did not like that.”

“That was Dolarhyde’s pet name for him, wasn’t it?” Hannibal recalled the bloody snuff films.

Beverly nodded, “I believe so. Whatever it was, it can’t happen again Hannibal. He snaps like that again I’m telling Crawford.”

“Understood, Agent Katz.”

*

Will was not asleep. He was bundled up in an old quilt on a loveseat, but his eyes were open and sharp when Hannibal walked in.

Will looked at him, fear swelling in his heart. Images of Hannibal killing him far too vivid in his mind. He drew back minisculely when Hannibal sat beside him.

"Do you want to talk about it?" Hannibal asked. He didn't want to scare the boy. He didn't know Will was already terrified.

Will shook his head, "Can we go home?"

"Of course darling," Hannibal stood and held out his hand. Will took it hesitantly as he was helped from the couch. Hannibal said goodbye to the Abayomi's while Will stood silently by his side.

They drove quietly for a while before Hannibal broke the silence, "Why didn't you call me?"

Will honestly didn't want to bother the older man. Will seemed to continually mess up, Hannibal must be tired of it. "I didn't want to bother. You said you were making dinner."

Hannibal placed his hand on the boy's thigh, "You are never a bother Will. Dinners can be remade. You however cannot be."

"I'm sorry Hannibal," Will whispered.

"You have nothing to be sorry for, but you mustn't fear talking to me."

Will swallowed hard. That's exactly what he feared. He stayed quiet to Hannibal's chargan.

When they arrived home, Will wanted to go straight to bed but Hannibal ordered him to stay with a gentle hand on his back. "You need to eat Will, and I think we should discuss what happened today."

Will scowled, "I didn't do anything wrong."

"Of course not, Mylimasis. But Agent Katz was a bit scared, why would she be scared?"

Will swallowed and allowed himself to be begrudgingly led to the table. Whatever Hannibal cooked smelled wonderful and his stomach growled.

Hannibal smiled, pleased at him, "You're hungry; eat and we will discuss."

Will sat as Hannibal began plating their supper. "I didn't mean to scare Bev."

"No?" Hannibal cut into the kidney, a delicious aroma bursting forth.

"No, I just couldn't stand what Freddie said to me."

"What did she say?" Hannibal slid a thin slice onto Will's plate, before reaching for the honeyed sauce to drizzle on top.

"She called me that name." Will admitted.

"What did she call you?"

"L-little dragon. Only the Great Red dragon calls me that." He felt his face flush with shame.

“I imagine that was upsetting.” Hannibal said as he slowly poured the dressing over the meat

“I hate her,” Will said darkly, “She shouldn’t say those things to me.”

Hannibal placed the plate with a clink in front of the boy. He leaned down by Will’s ear, unable to help himself, “What did you want to do to her?”

Hannibal’s voice was so low and soothing, it sent shivers down his spine and warmth blossomed in his belly. He answered honestly, “I wanted to kill her.”

Hannibal smiled, kissing the boy’s forehead, “Good boy.”

Will gasped at the feeling of Hannibal’s lips and his words spinning strange images in his head. He glanced confused at the older man as Hannibal took his seat. Hannibal smiled at him again, “Would you use your hands? Or perhaps take Agent Katz’s gun?”

Will gaped at the older man. Hannibal gestured at his plate, “Eat your food Will.”

Will didn’t know quite how to form words but he picked up the fork and knife and cut a piece. He raised it to his mouth. The piece practically melted in his mouth. He moaned in appreciation. He swallowed it, glancing at Hannibal to see the man cutting into his own meal. He slowly put his utensils down.

“I’d want to use a knife, but if one weren’t around, I’d bit it off.”

Hannibal glanced up surprised. He’d been happy enough to get Will’s admission to wanting to kill Freddie. He never expected the boy to answer how.

“To devour her. That is quite… *intimate* .”

“Yes.” Will whispered.

“Would you use your hands to finish her?”

“Yes.” Will admitted, shocking himself.

“The Dragon strangled her the first time, you would finish what he could not.”

“Yes.” Determination glinting in his eyes.

“You would be magnificent. A glory to behold. A god amongst men. I would kill thousands to see it. You: victorious and powerful.”

Will’s breath caught, unable to speak. They watched each other. Hannibal could see his boy’s pulse rising. The neurons in Will’s brain firing off in endless secession trying to sort out the situation. He saw Will’s decision as the boy’s body tensed and he stood boldly from his chair.

Will rounded the corner of the table, straddling Hannibal’s lap, and grasping the older man’s face. He kissed Hannibal with so much ferocity the older man couldn’t stop his lips from parting with a startled inhale. Will dove between his lips, his tongue exploring and lapping at

Hannibal's open lips. Hannibal's hand gravitated lightly to Will's hips, holding him as the boy fought to taste every inch of Hannibal's mouth.

"Will," Hannibal moaned.

"Hannibal," the boy panted.

Hannibal pulled away, his hands moving to cup Will's face, "Mylimasis, you are stunning."

"Tell me again?" Will begged his eyes wide with need.

Hannibal brushed his thumb under the boy's eye, "You're stunning."

Will blushed, "No, the other thing– about being v-victorious."

Hannibal smiled wickedly as he drew Will close, planting feathery kisses upon his cheeks as he spoke, "You, Will Graham, are victorious. You will defeat every foe you encounter. You'll rip them apart be it with your hands or teeth."

Will whimpered, closing his eyes as he sought to be closer to Hannibal. Burrowing his head in Hannibal's neck.

"My darling boy, you have all the power you need for vengeance and destruction. You can slay Lounds or the Dragon with a word. There is nothing stopping you."

"I want them dead," Will whispered into Hannibal's skin.

"We will paint their blood in the streets."

The certainty of the statement settled on Will with a calming power. Hannibal was certain. Hannibal would do it. Will leaned in. Mouthing at the man's neck. That's when he smelled it.

Blood. Hannibal smelled like blood. All at once everything was too much.

Will pulled away, staring frightened at Hannibal. Hannibal looked back at him ferociously.

Will scrambled off his lap. They had just been speaking of vengeance. Of killing Will's tormentors, but the moment Will smelt the blood, he realized it was too real. Hannibal was a killer, just like the Dragon– just like Will. Hannibal could and would kill.

"Will?" Hannibal asked slowly.

"You smell like blood."

Hannibal was silent. Staring at Will with unreadable eyes.

Will stepped back, afraid at how indecipherable Hannibal had suddenly become. "Hannibal, you smell like blood."

"Will," Hannibal rolled his name in his mouth like a delicious piece of meat, "I think you may need to take your medicine."

Will frowned, “No– I know what I smell– You killed someone, Hannibal.”

Hannibal stood, his height seemed exaggerated as Will shrunk away from him. “Mylimasis, your mind is a work of beauty. Why don’t you sit down?”

Will stumbled backwards rounding the far edge of the table, keeping Hannibal at a distance, “No, you killed someone–” Will pointed accusatively, “Who did you kill?”

“Does it matter, Will?” Hannibal tried to reason, the boy was obviously panicking.

“Yes! You can’t just kill people.”

“He was inconsequential. His death served a higher purpose.”

“A higher purpose?”

Hannibal glanced down at the plates unconsciously. Will felt his stomach turn as his quick mind made easy work of the puzzle.

“We ate him?” Will whispered.

Hannibal’s eyes widened in surprise. His clever, clever boy. Hannibal raised his hands placatingly, “Will, deep breaths, you need to calm down.”

“We ate him?!” Will’s hand’s migrated to his hair.

“Will, please breathe,” Hannibal instructed, but Will’s eyes had a glassy look and his fingers were pulling cruelly at his tangled curls. Hannibal rounded the table. Will stumbled back but tripped falling on the floor.

“No!” Will screamed as Hannibal grabbed him, “No, let go of me!”

Hannibal hauled him to his feet before releasing the boy. He stepped back giving the boy his space. Hannibal looked away from the crying mess he had caused, “Please don’t pull your hair.” He muttered.

Will backed into the wall, tears streaming from his eyes. He tried to wipe them away, but his fists clenched, wanting to hit the man for grabbing him. He choked out a hurt, “You fucking killed someone!”

“Do you not wish to kill, Will? To see Freddie and the dragons slayed?"

Will gave him a betrayed look. How dare he bring up his dreams. That was all they were: passing dreams. He might have killed, but that was the dragon forcing him, *right?* He could fantasize the Dragon's death– but for his own hands to do it? *Impossible.* He would never be strong enough.

He sobbed, "I can't, Hannibal, I can't. I’m too scared."

Hannibal softened immediately, "My darling, you don't have to do it on your own."

He knelt in front of the boy, taking a hold of one of Will's shaking hands, "I'm here Will. I won't let you do it alone."

Will wanted to fall into Hannibal's arms. To allow the older man to comfort him. Will didn't want to be alone. He didn't want to face his fantasies by himself. He needed guidance.

But Hannibal frightened him.

Will pulled away from his support, "Please stop, Hannibal."

Hannibal looked up at him. Will could see in his eyes he was heartbroken. Will choked back a sob not knowing if it was his or Hannibal's despair overwhelming him. "Please, I need time."

Hannibal's head lowered and he sat back on his feet, allowing Will to slip from his cornered spot. Will hurried to the hall, but Hannibal's words made him pause.

"I love you, Will."

Will looked back, his heart screamed to run back to the man who still knelt dejected on the floor, but his mind urged him away.

"I know," Will turned away, unable to handle the man's love and darted up the stairs.

Chapter 23

It was quiet in the house in the morning.

Will wearily exited the sanctuary of his room to go down stairs. It seemed Hannibal was already awake, for breakfast was sitting on the kitchen counter. Sliced fruit and toast. Not a trace of meat to be seen. Not a trace of Hannibal either.

Will felt like crying all over again. He'd spent half the night crying in his room until exhaustion finally took him. Why was everything so confusing?

He considered wandering around to find Hannibal, but decided against it. If the older man didn't want to see him, it was Will's own fault.

The doorbell rang and Will could hear Hannibal's footsteps coming from the study to the front door. "Good morning, Agent Katz," Hannibal's rich morning voice spoke, sounding more gruff than usual, "I believe Will is eating breakfast."

He wanted to hide as he heard them approach. He wanted to talk to Hannibal alone. Hannibal would hide behind his perfect facade while the agent was here. Will didn't want a mask, he just wanted Hannibal.

The duo entered the kitchen. Will's eyes immediately went to Hannibal. The man looked tired. The whites of his eyes were tinged red and his face was missing its normal color. He looked sick. Will felt his stomach twist at Hannibal's suffering. He wanted to hug him and tell him he was sorry.

But Beverly was there. And Will honestly didn't know if Hannibal would even want him. He had run from the man yesterday. A nagging voice in his head said he'd lost Hannibal's love. The man wouldn't want him or love him if he was always crying and hiding.

"Good morning, Will," Beverly greeted," She carried his school backpack and had a newspaper tucked under her arm, "You look tired."

Will shrugged, not knowing how to tell her he was an absolute fucking wreck and how he just destroyed his and Hannibal's relationship.

Hannibal thankfully saved him by gesturing to the paper, "What's the news?"

Beverly unfolded the pages, splaying it out in front of Will, "You dug yourself into this one."

MURDERER GETS SCHOLARSHIP TO UNIVERSITY COURTESY THE FBI!

The headline read in big black letters. Hannibal would think the title was distasteful. Will was more distracted by the large color photo of himself than the words. There he was. A close up image of him: Eyes wild, mouth seemingly foaming, with teeth bared for the camera. He

barely recognized himself. It was when he wanted to kill her, but Beverly pulled him away. He looked murderous.

He wasn't sure it was possible for him to look so threatening–he was just the little dragon after all. But there he was. A savage monster on the front page.

Hannibal swept the article from the counter top. Folding it and placing it away from Will. Hannibal wanted to keep the photo: his boy looking angry and vicious. Yet Will looked at it with such fear, he knew he needed to give Will a break from his own reflection.

Beverly sighed, crossing her arms,, "Will, you need to be ready for people to stare or try and talk to you at the school."

"Shouldn't he stay home, until this dies down?" Hannibal tried to reason.

"Jack wants the audience," Beverly explained, "It might make Dolarhyde more comfortable getting close."

"I don't believe this is the wisest course of action."

"Trust me I don't like it either," Beverly agreed, "But Jack wants to catch this guy." She placed her hand on Will's shoulder, "I'll be there with you the whole time. Go to classes and then go to the bookstore. Easy-peasy, right? You just have to promise me you'll be on your best behavior."

Will nodded mutely, unable to raise his head from where it sunk in fear and defeat.

"Look, I'm sure Hannibal has told you, but if you have another incident, Crawford will send you to Dr. Chilton," Beverly explained seriously.

Will swallowed hard. He knew he'd been in trouble for attacking the director, but he had no idea they were thinking of sending him to that man. He recalled how Dr. Chilton had tied him down, scared him into submission, had him drugged, kept him from Hannibal–

"Beverly," Hannibal's rich melodic voice sounded above Will's heart pounding, "Would you give Will and I a moment?"

No, no, no. Will thought. Though just moments before all he wanted to do was talk to the man, now that it seemed inevitable, Will wanted to run and hide. Had Hannibal agreed to sending him to Chilton? Why would he do such a thing? Did he really not care about him?

Beverly nodded, "Will, I'll be waiting in the car." She left them alone.

Hannibal was silent waiting to hear Beverly close the door. He watched the boy refuse to make eye contact. His eyes glued to the floor.

"Did you eat, Mylimasis?"

Will frowned unhappily, "There's no meat."

"I thought it better to avoid meat for now," Hannibal answered slowly.

"Because they're humans?" Will asked angrily.

"Because you are distressed. You don't need anything heavy in your stomach."

Will scowled, "I don't know what you want from me."

"I don't want anything from you, Will."

Will's heart sank. So it was true. Hannibal really didn't want him. He should have known. Will felt tears begin to escape his eyes. He covered his face with his hands trying to contain his emotions.

Hannibal tried to comfort him, raising his hand to pull the boy close, but Will shrunk away.

"Will…"

If Hannibal didn't want him, why did he care?

"Mylimasis, please don't cry. It will be alright."

"N-No–," Will shuddered, "No it won't. It's never going to be OK."

Hannibal drew back with a despondent sigh. Will refused to look at him. Refused to talk to him. Will didn't want him, and how could Hannibal blame him? He had lied to the boy and fed him half truths. Truths the boy wasn't ready to understand. He had lost his trust. Trust which Hannibal didn’t deserve.

He raised his hands, cupping the boy's face. He needed to touch Will, even if it did nothing to calm the boy. Will was shaking but Hannibal selfishly leaned down, kissing the boy's brow. He smelled like the disease. Sickly sweet.

"You should take your medicine,Will."

Will shook his head, "I don't want it."

Hannibal wanted to argue. To force the boy to take the antibiotics that would help him. But Will wasn't willing. And Hannibal had enough of forcing the boy to do anything.

So he nodded, "Alright, Will."

Will slipped from his hands, moving away from Hannibal. Distancing himself from the man who just wanted to hold and protect him.

"Be careful, Will," Hannibal murmured.

Will nodded curtly before turning quickly and leaving Hannibal alone.

*

The students were staring. Everyone was giving him long glances. Then they'd duck their heads together and whisper amongst each other. They pointed as Will and Beverly walked through the university halls.

"That's him."

"Who?"

"Will Graham."

"He killed a bunch of people."

"I thought that was the tooth fairy?"

"No, he was with the fairy. The protege."

"Fucking psycho."

Will walked quickly to his seat in class. Beverly right behind him. He wanted the day to be over. He wanted everything to go back to the way it was before. When Hannibal said he loved him and everything was perfect. But, now Hannibal didn't love him and the whole world seemed to be against him.

The teacher arrived and managed to get the class in order though there were multiple heavy glares during the lecture. Beverly made sure no one spoke to him when the classes switched, but that didn't stop them from muttering cruel things.

"Fucking monster."

"You should be locked up."

"You're fucking heartless."

"Murderer."

Will put his head down on the desk. Beverly didn't nudge him to sit up this time. He wanted to cry, but he couldn't manage it. He'd cried all night. Honestly, their words and looks meant little to him. It was Hannibal he wanted to cry over. Hannibal who killed and ate people. Hannibal who would send him to Dr. Chilton. Hannibal who didn't want him. Hannibal who didn't love him anymore.

Will's little world he'd created was collapsing.

Eventually the classes finished and the students were leaving. Will felt numb to the looks. He felt numb everywhere. He moved easily, Beverly's hand holding his arm guiding him through the building and then down the street.

"Any word on the investigation?" An irritating voice asked.

Will glanced up, his whole body tensing. It was her, Freddie Lounds. She had a mic today and a cameraman. The glassy camera lens faced him as it had 22 other times. The red blinking light signaling recording in process. Like Pavlov's dog, Will felt the urge to stab something.

Will couldn't control much in his life, but as his fist hit Freddie's jaw, he felt more powerful. He felt more like his own self, not someone's plaything or toy. He had a choice and he chose to attack. She fell and he was on top of her. His fingers raked across her face as he tore at her skin. When she screamed. It felt good.

Beverly was grabbing him, but he wasn't finished with Freddie. She had to die.

"Will stop!"

He wouldn't. Har face was bleeding. Will was trying to rip her face off. To tear it from her skull. There was blood everywhere.

And then suddenly, he was being hauled off her. He wasn't finished with her yet. She wasn't dead. He could see the cameraman kneeling beside her, the camera on the ground forgotten.

"Let me go!" He screamed, thrashing at whoever held him.

"Stop it Will!" Beverly yelled as she shoved him on the ground. His face scraped against the sidewalk and his arms were jerked behind him, as Beverly pinning him to the concrete.

"Oh my god. Oh my god," The camera was saying, horror in his voice, "I don't think she's breathing."

Will stopped fighting when he heard. So he'd done it. She was dead. Good.

"Fuck!" Beverly yelled, "Call 911!"

Will layed completely still beneath the agent. Her grip was tight on him.

"Fuck, Will– Why did you– why?" Beverly panted over him, soft enough just for him to hear.

He relaxed under her. It was a trick he used with the dragon. He would go pliant under the man, to show him that he wouldn't fight anymore. That the dragon was in control. Will lay limp for the agent. She was in control.

He whined softly under her, "I'm sorry, Bev."

"Don't fucking call me that– It's agent Katz. Fuck Will!" Beverly said angrily, but she honestly sounded more sad than angry.

"I'm sorry," Will whispered.

"Christ, Will, they're going to lock you up– why did you do it?"

They're going to send me to Doctor Chilton. Will's brain realized. Images flooded his mind of locked doors, dark cells, restraints holding him down, needles dripping with sedatives– stabbing through his skin.

"No," Will whimpered, "I want Hannibal."

Beverly shifted over him and he felt cold metal circle his wrist. He jerked away, only for the cuff to be snapped down hard.

"No! Please Bev! Please stop!" Will cried. He couldn't go to prison. No, all he wanted was Hannibal– but Hannibal didn't want him. *Oh god, I'm all alone* .

"Will, please stay still," Beverly pleaded.

Will felt his eyes swell– already red from the night of crying. His harsh tears fell on the cement, but he stayed still. Beverly snapped the other ring around his wrist. There was a crowd gathering.

Beverly was calling someone over, "Get him in the car. We need to clear the scene."

Hands pulled at his arms and he was lifted from the ground. Medics were beside the limp body of Freddie Lounds and a large crowd of students had gathered. Two FBI agents dragged him away from the scene to a waiting SUV. Will was thrown in the back.

"We have vitals," A medic confirmed as he knelt by the unconscious reporter.

"She's OK?" Beverly asked.

"He nicked an artery in her neck. She's lost a lot of blood, but we've stopped the bleeding. We need an ambulance."

Beverly nodded and turned to her fellow agents, "Take Will to Quantico. I want this scene cleared."

The agents hurried to the SUV to leave. Beverly turned back to the crowd. She wiped the blood that had splattered on her on her pants. She knew Will was dangerous. She knew what he was capable of, and still she was aghast.

"Agent Katz!" She heard from behind her. She looked, the agent looked deathly pale, "He's gone!"

*

Will ran as fast as he could with his hands still shackled behind him. He had slipped out the other side of the car when they had thrown him in. He knew it was his only chance at escape. They would lock him up if they took him. He'd be drugged constantly. He knew what happened when he was drugged: men would take him. They'd have their way with him. Will hated it, he had to get away.

He wove through the college buildings. He knew Beverly was close behind him. People were looking, he had to get away from people. He darted down an alley. He heard Beverly run by calling his name. He waited for a moment before darting out in the opposite direction. He crossed a street, having no idea where he was, all he knew was he needed to get away from everyone.

He ran down a building's alley, panting from the exertion. He looked behind him, Beverly was nowhere to be seen to his relief. He paused, almost doubling over as he tried to catch his breath. Where was he going to go?

Briefly, he considered going back to Hannibal. But Hannibal knew about Doctor Chilton. He knew about the plan to lock him away. He couldn't trust Hannibal not to turn him over to the FBI. No, Hannibal didn't love him anymore, he could never go back to Hannibal.

Crunch.

Will spun around, terrified that Beverly might have found him. He almost screamed when he saw him–

"Little one," The Great Red Dragon smiled, "I've missed you."

Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

SO SORRY FORGOT TO POST THIS WEEKEND THAT WAS AN AWFUL CLIFF HANGER TO LEAVE YOU ALL ON I'M SORRY

Hannibal almost fell to his knees. There was blood on the ground. A possessive fire urged him to lean down. To run his fingers through the still wet pavement and lick Will's blood from the pads of his fingers until there was no more blood to be seen. Not a drop should be wasted. It was too precious to be left.

"Looks like Dolarhyde- or whoever- came up behind him. He knocked him to the ground and slammed his head on the pavement," one of the FBI analysts observed.

"He fucking ran. Why did he run?" Beverly murmured to herself. She was standing back from the scene. Arms crossed while medics attempted to wipe the blood from her.

Besides the blood splattered on the ground there was Will's phone and the tracker laying smashed on the ground. The only reason they'd found the alley was from the last location it had pinged to the FBI's server.

"No one else knows or cares enough about Will to attack him. This was definitely Dolarhyde," Jack said. He had arrived at the scene when Hannibal had. Both stressed but for different matters. Hannibal because Will was gone and Jack because the killer had slipped through their defenses.

"What about the victim's families?" Beverly asked, "Freddie published that article. They knew he was in the area."

"There's no body," Hannibal said quietly. He could remember how he killed all those men long ago. How he had killed them all for touching his sister. His Mischa. No, if the families were out for revenge, Will would be dead. Not simply gone.

Jack nodded soberly, "Dolarhyde wants the boy alive."

Crawford seemed to see something near the wall of the building. He moved and crouched some distance from the main bloody patch, "There's more blood over here." He gestured for the agent to photograph the evidence.

"He knocked the boy unconscious then dragged him away from the entrance of the alley," Hannibal noted, "He must have hid while the FBI searched, then slipped away while our back was turned."

“He knows our movements. He’s been scouting the area, which means we’ve likely gotten him on camera,” Jack surmised.

He gestured to the analyst, “Pull CCTV footage from around the area. Start running it for cars, license plates, and facial recognition. I want to find this son of a bitch.”

Beverly stepped forward, “I’ll help.”

“No,” Jack ordered, “Go home and clean up. You lost our suspect.”

Beverly’s face fell, but she didn’t argue, only turned and left. Hannibal watched her leave. She had been an ally to Will and now she was off the case.

“I’d like to assist,” Hannibal asserted.

Jack gave him a long look. “You aren’t needed. Your one job was to keep him mentally stable enough to lure Dolarhyde. You didn’t keep him stable.”

Hannibal’s lip curled. He had a hundred different arguments to throw at Jack, but the man raised his hand silencing him, “Go home, Hannibal. If we find him, I’ll call you.”

Jack turned, having dismissed him out of his mind. Hannibal took one last look at Will’s blood, before turning and leaving. There was no use lingering by Will’s blood. It only made to unnerve him further.

Jack’s word’s haunted him as he left: *If* we find him.

*

There was an endless energy building in Hannibal. His body felt like a dam holding back the waves of emotions. He had not broken before. His resolve was strong and yet for Will he could feel the cracks forming. The fissures were beginning to leak. If he continued to do nothing they would explode.

But Hannibal had nothing to do. He wandered around his house. Before Will it had been his fortress of solitude. The place where he could unshed his mask, unseen from the world. Then Will crashed into his life, with his emotions and his all-seeing presence. To say Will had rocked his world, would be an understatement. He couldn't bring himself to resent the boy for it. In fact, he found he enjoyed the invasion.

For so long he’d been alone. He had been content as he could be. Enjoying his life as he did, but it all felt empty now without Will. Like Will had filled a hole he didn’t know he had in his life.

Hannibal walked upstairs, his feet taking him to Will's room. He stood outside afraid to enter. It would be like breaking a spell. If he left it untouched Will might come bounding from the closet or sit up on the bed wrapped in bundles of blankets. If he stepped over the threshold, then Will would be truly gone.

But the boy drew him in. Even though he was gone. His presence in the room was so strong Hannibal had to step through. He reverently observed the space. So quiet without Will's nervous fretting.

Hannibal ran his hand along the dresser and the book shelf. So much space just waiting to be filled with books and knick nacks. Hannibal flipped open the little bound book the Incredible Journey. It had small illustrations of the animals. Hannibal traced the bulldog like Will would. He'd be so delighted to have such benign drawings. He'd rush to show Hannibal the drawings pouring over the images more than the story.

He set the book carefully down where Will had left it. He moved to the closet. Will's scent was prevalent here. The boy would hide in the clothes. He liked the calm dark space. Hannibal pulled a shirt from a hanger he knew Will wore. He held it under his nose, inhaling the boy's faint scant. Will hadn't worn his clothes enough for it to smell like Will.

He walked out of the closet, going to Will's un-made bed.

The boy had slept restlessly. The blankets were in a disarray from the boy's tossing and turning. His sheets were clammy from the boy's dried sweat. Hannibal's nostrils flared at the smell of the boy's fear. Will was so afraid. Afraid of Hannibal.

Hannibal layed on the bed, bringing Will's pillow to his chest. He hugged the pillow how he wished he could once more hold Will. He took in the boy's fear. Yes, he was to blame, but he could heal Will. Will could rest in his arms. His fear would drift away when Hannibal brushed his hair from his face. He would smile when Hannibal wrapped his arm around the boy's chest and whisper in his ear that he loved him. He would never let go. Hannibal would keep the boy safe.

Hannibal sighed, rolling over on Will's bed. He spotted Blue partially laying under the blankets. Hannibal dropped the pillow reaching the stuffed animal. He sat up, holding the dog close. Will love the little dog so easily. He was so accepting of the stuffed pet.

Hannibal stood taking Will's beloved animal. He wondered downstairs. He sat at the kitchen counter. The remains of Will's breakfast was still untouched and scattered across the counter. Hannibal stared blanking at the food. He brought Blue closer to his chest.

He felt empty and alone.

He didn't know how long he sat there, but he blinked to consciousness when his phone rang. It was late now. He considered letting it ring, but Jack might be calling. He pulled out his phone. The number was unknown. He answered anyway.

"Hello?"

Ragged breath.

Hannibal stood, squeezing Blue in one hand, "Will?"

Nothing. Just breathing. Hannibal clutched the phone tighter, "Will? Will, is that you?"

The voice groaned in pain and it whispered so faintly, "Hannibal, please help me."

Chapter 25

Will woke dazed. His head was throbbing in pain. His face felt warm and he found he was laying down. His face was pressed against a moldy smelling blanket. He blinked trying to reorient himself, but all he could see was a very blurred stained blanket.

He lifted his head. His temple seemed to want to stick to the blanket. He peeled away, staring in surprise at the brownish red stain on the crumpled cover. He raised a shaky hand to his brow, it felt crusty and then as he touched more, damp. And blinding pain. He drew his fingers away, blinking terrified at the blood on his fingers. New blood.

His hands were covered in dry blood that was not his. *That was Freddie Lound's blood* , his brain supplied him. But the bright red blood on the pads of his fingers staining the covers *, that was his.* His head was bleeding, his mind finally concluded.

"Little one."

Will whipped around. Hearing his voice sent his body into a panic. He wanted to run away, he wanted to hide, he wanted Hannibal to hold him and protect him from the monster. All he managed to do was scramble away frantically. He backed into the headboard where he cowered from the Dragon.

The dragon was sitting in a chair at the end of the bed watching the boy. There was old peeling wallpaper behind him, a door off to his left and another to his right. Will's brain connected that they were probably in some sort of rundown motel room by the look and smell of it. That gave him no hope and he whimpered. A grisly grin spread across the Dragon's face, "You're awake."

"Great dragon," Will whispered. He lowered his head submissively, afraid to look at the monster directly.

"I've been looking for you, Will." The dragon growled.

"I'm sorry," Will answered. The dragon was angry at him. The dragon should never have to look for him. Will was not supposed to leave him. Will should never have been away from him in the first place. It was Will's fault. He was bad. Will choked on a sob and repeated himself, "I'm sorry, Great Dragon."

The man walked over, towering over the boy on the bed. Will tried to sink lower, but the dragon's hand shot out. Gripping the boy's chin, forcing his eyes up. Will dared to look up at the dragon, the monster's expression full of fury.

"I'm disappointed in you Will. You didn't come back to me."

Will whimpered.

The dragon back handed him. The boy fell sideways on the mattress, trying to remain as still as he could. He realized his hands were free, momentarily wondering where the cuffs Beverly had placed on him went.

"You tried to run away." The dragon spoke darkly. His hand threading through Will's curls before gripping them cruelly.

Will screamed when his hair was almost ripped from his scalp as the dragon pulled him close. His neck arched painfully back, while his face was forced close to the dragon's stinking breath. Dolarhyde shook him hard, spitting in his face, "You left!"

"No!" Will managed to groan. He had to do something before the dragon killed him, "No, I would never leave you. They took me! They took me away from you!"

The dragon snarled but he loosened his painful grip slightly. "How did they find us?"

"I don't know," Will sobbed. He hesitantly placed his palms on the Dragon's chest hoping to calm the monster. They were no longer cuffed, but there was red bruising around each wrist. The Dragon didn't shake him again, so Will slowly leaned close, resting his cheek on the man's chest. He cried softly, "I missed you, great dragon."

The dragon hummed, obviously enjoying Will tears and his desperate attempts for peace. The man began to massage Will's scalp, his fingernails scratching over Will's sensitive head.

"I missed you. I missed you so much. I'm sorry. I'm sorry they took me," Will mumbled into the man's chest. The man's shirt smelled like blood and sweat, but Will nuzzled closer knowing the dragon delighted in his anguished cries.

"They don't see the world like you do," Will pleaded, "They don't see the great dragon."

"And you do?" The dragon asked.

"Yes, god– yes." Will fought to make it sound true. To make the dragon believe him, "You're the only thing that makes sense.

The dragon paused, his other hand coming to caress Will's bruised cheek. "I know little one," the monster said softly, "We understand each other, don't we?"

"Yes," Will agreed.

"Then you understand why I have to punish you," The dragon said coldly.

Will gasped softly. He knew it was coming. He understood the dragon and the dragon was cruel. He tried to calm himself, he had to please the dragon. Accept his position as the little dragon. He cast his eyes downwards and whispered, "Yes, great dragon."

"How should you be punished?" The dragon asked, his hand still petting Will's face.

Will swallowed, thinking hard what would please the dragon and not hurt. He was frightened. The dragon could easily beat him, whip him. But would it satisfy the man's sadism? His lust?

Will knew he would cry, but he needed to convince the man he was still loyal. That he was still his good little dragon.

“You need to m-mark me,” Will said quietly.

The dragon’s eyes narrowed and he cocked his head to the side.

Will hurriedly explained, “So they know. They know I’m yours.”

The dragon smiled with too many teeth, “Good boy.”

Will hesitantly smiled back, knowing he had pleased the man. He couldn’t help but tremble with anticipation. He might have proven his loyalty, but there was no telling what the dragon would do. Will was afraid of *how* the man would decide to mark him. He could take sex. He could take a whipping, but what if the dragon did something else?

The hit came out of nowhere. He was thrown back on the bed. He had lost his focus and the dragon punished him for it. He curled and whimpered again, hiding his head in his hands to shield from any more blows. Thankfully no more fell, and Will peaked out. The dragon was across the room, shuffling through a duffle bag. Will couldn’t help but stare as the man pulled out a switchblade from the bag. The dragon turned, grinning maniacally as he flicked the knife open.

Will’s eyes widened, “No, please.”

But the dragon was already stalking towards him. Snapping the knife open and closed, over and over, each time making Will flinch.

He stopped at the edge of the bed looking down at Will. His knife traced Will’s foot.

"Should I take your foot for running?" The dragon asked his voice low.

Will shuddered, shaking in fear, "No, please dragon, I would never run from you. Never."

The dragon pressed the knife to the boy's heel. He could feel the blade sink into his skin and he hissed in pain, but he didn't move trying to prove he wouldn't run away. He had to prove it or this would get ugly quick.

The man seemed to get bored with the cut he made on Will's heel. He hummed in satisfaction, before grabbing Will’s ankle and yanking him down the bed so he was laid prone on his back. The dragon climbed on top of Will. Straddling Will’s hips and leaning over the boy grinning wickedly. Will twisted his hands in the sheets forcing his hands to remain by his sides. The knife dangerously traced Will's face.

"Should I take your tongue?"

Will was shaking so hard, he was afraid the knife would cut him just by his trembling, "N-no please dragon. Please."

“You like to spout lies to me like that useless reporter,” The dragon glowered.

“No! No lies. I wouldn’t lie,” Will gasped, “I hated that reporter too!”

“Then your lips then?” The knife danced around his lips, "You're a pathetic whore. You kiss that man, that doctor. Isn't that right?"

Hannibal. Oh, he wished Hannibal would save him. He wanted the man's kind eyes. His gentle touch, his intoxicating kisses.

The dragon must have seen his thoughts for he pressed the flat of the blade against Will's chapped lips. The edges cut Will's bottom lip and he could feel the trickle of blood begin. He whimpered but didn't deny it. He was too exposed, he couldn't lie to the dragon.

The dragon growled, pressing harder and wrapping his other hand around the boy's neck.

"Did you spread your legs for him too? Did you let him fuck you?"

"N-no, gr-e-a-t on-e," Will gasped with a tiny bit of air. He felt dizzy and his body hurt.

"I'm sure he did. You begged him to, didn’t you”

"No! O-only you. Only you."

The dragon was still angry but he moved on, the blade circling Will's eyelid.

"What about your eyes? Should I take them?"

"No, great dragon, I want to see you! You're all I want to see!" Will gasped.

The dragon hummed unconvinced.

“Please great dragon, please!” Will cried as the knife split his skin above his brow. He felt the warm blood drip down into his eye socket. He blink furiously trying to clear his vision. The dragon seemed to swim in red above him as his vision blurred with blood.

"Please, my eyes are yours! Please they're yours. I just want to see you!"

The dragon's fingers wiped away the blood pooling around his eye.

"Thank you, thank you," He whispered reverently as the dragon thumbed away the rest of the blood. Will couldn't stop from sighing with relief as his vision returned. Will found himself leaning into the man's touch. Pressing his cheek into the man's hand, even though the cold handle of the blade still rested there.

The dragon leaned down, kissing his bleeding lips and Will, to his shame, whined needingly into them. The dragon growled and his kiss turned hungry. Biting and sucking at Will. Will returned the kisses with as much strength as he could manage. Somewhere in Will's mind, he knew this was wrong. What the dragon was doing was wrong. But the man's lustful hunger, the insistent painful kisses, the man's harding length digging into Will's stomach, it was all overwhelming Will. As the man rolled his hips into the boy. Will's mind drifted down

allowing the monster above him to use him how he'd like. It was too much. There was no Will here. It was only the dragon and the dragon’s will.

The dragon eventually pulled away. Will tried to chase the man's lips with a soft, "Dragon please," but the man was finished with his mouth.

The dragon shifted down Will’s body. Rough hands grabbed him and he was flipped on his stomach. He cried out, startled. The dragon’s hands dipped under his shirt, cold fingers scratching his back and sides. His shirt was yanked up. The dragon pulled it, forcing Will’s arms above his head as the fabric became knotted around his head and biceps. Will screamed as he realized he couldn’t move to untangle himself. He felt claustrophobic. The fabric was pressing everywhere. He couldn’t take a full breath of air.Everything was hot and dark.

The dragon grabbed the top of his head by the hair. Will shrieked in pain as his head was craned back.

“Quiet, little one,” The dragon growled, his heavy weight crushing Will into the mattress.

Will whimpered, “Please– please take it off.”

“You’ll stay like this until I’m finished with you,” The dragon’s fingers traced his upper back, over his shoulder blades, “You’ll be marked all mine, little dragon.”

Will sobbed. He felt his tears wetting the fabric wrapped around his face and arms.

The dragon pressed the cold flat of the blade against Will’s skin.

“You belong to me.”

Will could only cry in answer.

“I’m going to put my name on you so everyone will know who you belong to.”

Will shook and screamed as the knife cut his back. The dragon didn’t stop. The blade continued to slice into the boy’s back. All Will could feel was the short jagged slashes of the knife over and over. His voice felt raw from screaming and eventually the pain and damp old air around his face pushed him into unconsciousness.

*

Will woke when it was all over. His shirt was now completely gone but his arms were still stretched above his head. He dully blinked awake, barely able to lift his head enough to see his hands were tied to the bed with rope. Even the slightest movement made him groan in pain. The wounds on his back were still fresh. All he could hope was that the cuts weren’t too deep and the blood would clot soon.

His blood froze when he heard a movement behind him in the room. He wished he wasn’t lying flat on his face so he could see. He was terrified the Dragon was just waiting for him to wake to begin round two. He didn’t know if he could take much more of the knife.

A hand rested on his head, and Will wailed. He was so afraid of the monster. But the hand just petted his hair until his cries turned into quiet sobs.

“It’s all done,” the Dragon said comfortingly.

Will trembled and sniffled, afraid it was too good to be true.

“I’m going to shower,” The dragon said, his hand left Will’s head, “Then we can leave.”

Will listened until he heard a door close and water begin to run in the shower, before he took a full breath. Then he began to slowly scoot up the bed. The pain seared down his back with every movement, but he finally managed to get his legs under him, and he was able to kneel at the top of the bed. He let his head rest on the backboard as he panted from the exertion.

He darted a look around the room, careful not to twist his body and pull at the drying lacerations. It was a dingy motel room with the curtains tightly closed over the windows. The single bed took up the majority of the room with a small side table and phone. Will’s eyes widened when he saw the phone sitting beside the bed. He could call for help.

Will felt his heart sink.

He couldn’t call the police. They would send him straight to prison. He had killed all those people– and now Freddie Lounds too. He thought about how Beverly had put him in handcuffs, how she would send him away. She was the kindest agent Will knew, and even she thought he should be locked up.

Would prison be any better than the dragon? Will shivered. At least the dragon didn’t drug him all the time. Will could imagine his life in a cell with strange masked doctors coming in with dripping syringes, just waiting for him to slip under the foggy haze of drugs to pry him open.

No. He couldn’t call the police. It would be better to just give up. Don’t fight the dragon. He only wished he could hear Hannibal’s voice one more time. That low timber that sent butterflies dancing in his stomach and seemed to make everything in the world alright. If he could just hear him once more.

Will pulled at his bindings. One hand was slightly loose and he pulled and twisted at the rope. The rope bit at his wrist and earned him a nasty rope burn, but he managed to free one hand. He threw his body towards the side of the bed, his free arm reaching the old corded phone. His back screamed at the stretch, Will could feel the wounds splitting open from where the blood had clotted them closed.

His hands fumbled for the receiver and he was able to knock it on the table and drag it to him. Shakily, he pressed the numbers in. The only phone number he had memorized; Hannibal’s.

Trembling, he waited as the line rang. *Please pick up. I just need to hear your voice. Please pick up. Please pick up. Please–*

“Hello?”

There he was. Will could hardly believe it. Hannibal’s kind voice was right there on the other line. So close, yet so far.

"Will?" Hannibal asked.

How did he know it was him? Will should hang up. He had heard his voice. That was all he needed. He should give up now. Resign himself to his life with the dragon.

"Will? Will, is that you?" Hannibal sounded so lost. So desperate.

Will let out a small choked sob. He didn’t want to stay here. He didn’t want to be the dragon’s plaything. He wanted Hannibal. He wanted Hannibal’s soft words. He wanted the man’s gentle hands. He wanted Hannibal to save him. For the man’s strange dark power to rescue him from this terrible place.

"Hannibal,” Will answered, his name sounding like a prayer from Will’s lips, “Please help me."

Chapter 26

“Will, you need to tell me where you are,” Hannibal's voice came through urgently.

“I- I don’t know,” Will sobbed.

“Are there any signs or names you can make out?”

“No– I’m in a hotel room. I don’t know where. I’m sorry, Hannibal. I’m sorry.”

“You’re alright Will.” Hannibal’s calm voice reassured him, “Is Dolarhyde close?”

“H-he’s in the s-shower,” Will was shaking.

“Are you hurt, Mylimasis?”

“Y-yes,” Will stuttered, “H-he cut me.”

Will thought he heard the man growl which made him whimper.

“Can you get out of the room?” Hannibal asked.

Will pulled at his other wrist, knowing he could probably get out of it, but it would take a few minutes with his trembling and dizziness. He shook his head considering that idea, “I got one hand free, but the other’s still tied. He’ll hear the door if I go out.”

“Will, you need to call the police,” Hannibal said gravely.

“No,” Will whimpered, “They’ll send me away.

“Will, please. You need to hang up and call 911.”

“No. I can’t. I killed Freddie. I’ll go to prison, Hannibal.”

“Freddie’s alive, Mylimasis. You need to call the police, now.”

Will gasped. The reporter was alive? She hadn’t been breathing or conscious when he’d been dragged away. Maybe there was a chance they’d have pity on him?

The shower stopped and Will froze.

“Will?” Hannibal asked, sensing something was off, “Will, what is it?”

“He’s done. Hannibal, he's going to come back.” Will whispered frantically. He was trembling so much, he could barely keep his grip on the phone.

“Will, Can you put your hand back in the rope?”

Will looked at the knot, it was looser, so he could shove his wrist back in, “Y-yes.”

“Will, listen carefully. I need you to put me on speaker phone and then put the receiver back. He cannot know you touched it. I will be able to hear in the room. Can you do that?

“I think so, Hannibal”

“Good boy. When he comes back, I need you to try and get him to tell you where you are or where you’re going.”

Will whimpered, “What if he cuts me again Hannibal?”

Hannibal snarled, “Then I will rip him limb from limb, but for now, my darling, you must be brave and be quick. Do as I say.”

Will didn’t delay. He shook as he reached over and pressed the speakerphone button. He placed the receiver back in place and hurriedly worked his hand back into his bindings. Hannibal was quiet over the line, but the little green light on the phone told him Hannibal was there. He was there with him, listening. He just needed to give him a location and he’d be there. Will took a shaky breath and lowered himself back on his stomach. He didn’t want the dragon to know he moved.

The door opened a moment later and Will could feel the man’s presence in the room. *Focus* , he told himself, *you have to get a location* . Will pretended to stir for the first time. He moaned, “D-dragon?”

“Little one,” the dragon purred, “Feeling better?”

“Yes, sir,” Will answered fearfully. He couldn’t stop his voice from quavering.

The dragon was standing right by him. His hand came to settle on Will’s taunt shoulder, dangerously close to where the monster had carved his back. The man’s hand followed his arm up to his wrists where he began to work his bindings open. Will prayed the monster wouldn’t notice how loose the one hand was.

The dragon finally got his hands free and helped Will sit up on the bed. Will felt so dizzy from the slight movement, he swayed in the dragon’s arms. The monster held him up, chuckling, “You’re tired, little one. You can sleep in the car.”

Will wanted to yell that he wasn’t tired. He was just woozy from the blood loss and the pain throbbing on his back. Instead he settled for resting his hand on the monster’s arm still holding him up. Dolarhyde was only clothed in a towel from the shower. He stroked the monster’s forearm with his fingers and murmured, “Where are we going?”

“To a new place,” The dragon said.

That wasn’t good enough. Hannibal needed more than that. Will held the man’s arm, pressing for an answer, “Where, great dragon?”

"Enough, little one," The man turned and went to pack his things. Leaving Will swaying precariously on the bed.

“Are we going to a different state? Or staying here?” Will asked frantically.

“Stop asking questions,” the dragon said darkly and Will lowered his head.

“I’m sorry,” Will managed to whisper weakly. The dragon was not going to tell him where they were going. It was obvious he wanted Will in the dark. But he couldn’t give up, Hannibal was right there listening. Hannibal could save him. He just needed a location. Will twisted the sheets in his grip. If the dragon wouldn’t tell him where they were going, Will needed to create a stop on their trip.

He shifted slowly, bringing his legs out from under him and sliding them over the edge of the mattress. He stood wincing in pain and shivering feverishly.

He limped over to where the dragon was sifting through his duffle bag on the chair. Will reached out tentatively and lightly touched the dragon– the actual dragon tattooed on Dolarhyde’s back.

“Great Dragon?”

The man spun around with his hand raised. Will flinched, drawing his hand back to cover his face.

“What are you doing?” The dragon snapped angrily.

“I–I miss you,” Will stuttered, “Please, I really missed you.”

“What?” The dragon asked, confused.

Will tentatively stepped closer. Placing his hands on the dragon’s chest. He dared to look up. The dragon looked unamused but was not pulling away. Will stretch as tall as he could. He softly pressed his lips against the dragon’s pursed mouth. Will kissed him again with more strength, pulling just a breath away from the man, “You put your name on me.”

“Yes?” The dragon’s hands had migrated to Will’s hips.

“You’ve done so much for me.”

“Yes,” The dragon said darkly, his lust brooding in his eyes.

“Let me do something for you?”

“Yes,” The dragon agreed, hoisting Will up and throwing him on the bed. Will stopped himself from screaming as his back flared in pain. He forced himself to smile up at the dragon and open his legs.

“I want to do something for you– more than just this.”

The dragon was staring lustfully down at him, “More Will?”

Will nodded, “I want to kill for you.”

The dragon grinned and climbed on top of the boy, kissing and sucking on his neck, “You’re such a good little dragon. I’ll give you lots to kill. Not just on full moons– everyday.”

“Yes–yes,” Will gasped, “But I want to kill someone important first.”

The dragon pulled away, eyeing him with suspicion. “Who?”

“Hannibal. Hannibal Lecter. The doctor that found me.”

“You want to kill the doctor?”

“Yes. He tried to take me from you! He wanted me– B-but I only want you.” Will lied, the words making him feel sick.

“You want revenge?”

“Yes. Please great dragon?” Will begged, “You carved yourself into me– I want to carve him out.”

The dragon hissed in delight, biting Will’s neck, “You’re perfect Will.”

“Can we kill him? Please Dragon? The FBI won’t be watching– they think you’ve left.”

The dragon hummed considering it.

Will continued, “I know you know where he lives. You’ve been watching us. We could kill him in his home– take his teeth, his eyes.”

“I’d take his hands,” The monster snapped.

“Yes!” Will agreed immediately. Will took a breath, trying to think of what would make the dragon agree. He had to get them to Hannibal. He had to make it a deal the dragon couldn’t resist. “We could bleed him out slowly.”

The dragon’s eyes glinted dangerously. Will shuddered licking his lips nervously, “Cut him where it really hurts, A–and then while he’s dying y-you could have me– f–fuck me. Right in front of him.”

The dragon leaned close to Will’s face. The boy’s face just inches from his, “You’d like that, wouldn’t you?” The dragon ripped his towel away, pressing his erection down on Will.

Will gasped, fear and panic growing in his chest. He almost screamed in desperate hopelessness, “Yes! Please just tell me we’ll go to him!”

The man’s hands were working on his pants.The button and zipper were pulled and the fabric ripped down his thighs.

“At his home! Please he has to know,” Will gasped as he shot a glance at the phone. The light was still there. Hannibal had to know they were coming. The dragon had to agree.

“Please, great dragon!” Will begged.

“Yes, little one, we'll kill him,” The dragon growled.

The dragon flipped on his stomach, forcing his legs apart. Will bit back a sobbed as the dragon spit on his hole, a thumb roughly pressing into him and then a blunt head of the cock at his entrance. He twisted his hands in the sheets to stop himself from screaming. Everything was too dry and he couldn’t relax.

“I can see my name on you whenever I fuck you.” The dragon sneered over him. The dragon’s hand traced the cuts before pressing down on the boy’s shoulder, pinning him as he began to push inside.

Will screwed his eyes closed. It felt like the first time the dragon had fucked him. Except instead of being paralyzed from a drug, Will forced himself not to move. His hands fisted the sheets as the dragon split him through.

He could feel himself crying, the tears running down his face. Will turned his face, pressed against the sheets, towards the phone. He could see the green light. Hannibal was there. He would save him. He just had to bear it for a while longer.

Chapter 27

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal had felt helpless twice in his life.

The first when he was young and helpless to stop the men from killing Mischa. His darling little sister. He was too weak and they had stolen her without his knowledge. Hannibal had hardened himself after Mischa. The walls he built were impenetrable.

Or so he thought. Now he once more felt the terror of inability creep into him. He could do nothing for Will. Listening in earnest attention as the boy followed his instructions. Hannibal wished he hadn't told him to find his location. He wished Will had called the police. He wished the boy had run when he could have. But instead he was following Hannibal's directions. The boy had convinced the monster of a plot to kill him. A clever idea if not for the horrible and dire consequences of Will's actions.

The sickening slapping of flesh. Will's small gasps. The dragon's panting.

Hannibal clutched the phone silently. Daring not to move or breathe. A single sound could give Will away and he'd be lost forever. Hannibal didn't know how long it went on or how long he stood there with the phone pressed against his ear.

It finally finished.

Hannibal could hear the shifting of bodies. There was rustling and he could faintly hear Will crying softly. There was a moment of quiet and then a sharp voice ordered, "Get dressed."

Hannibal strained to hear, but there was a quiet groan and the bed creaking slowly as Will must have sat up.

There was a mechanical clicking sound Hannibal couldn't identify, but Will obviously did for he gasped in alarm.

"W–What are you doing?"

"What do you think?" The dragon said darkly.

"You're going to shoot him?" Will whispered.

"Yes, little one, We'll wound him then you can get all bloody for me."

"O–okay. You are very good with a gun," Will stated the obvious, his tone emphasizing the word gun. He wanted Hannibal to hear it. To know the dragon would be armed.

"Get dressed," the dragon ordered again.

Will whimpered but Hannibal could hear more movement as the boy put on the clothes.

"Hurry up," the dragon snapped, and Hannibal heard a door opening.

"Don't say anything," Will suddenly said. His tone was urgent, obviously speaking to Hannibal, "He has a gun. A handgun. He used to be in the military, he's a good shot, so be careful–"

The door opened once more, "Will, come on!"

Hannibal could hear the boy limping away. A quiet, "I'm sorry." Was met by a harsh slap and Will yelped in pain.

"Come," The dragon grabbed him and dragged him from the room. The door slammed.

Hannibal waited several moments, listening for any other movements, in case they returned to the room, but there was silence. He slowly drew the phone away and ended the call.

They would be there soon.

He immediately turned on the lights in the house. He wanted to be seen. He wanted the dragon to know he was there alone. No where in his mind was the thought to call the FBI. He would not allow their hands on his boy again. Will would not be punished for any of his actions. He would be free, Hannibal would see to it.

He drew a knife from the kitchen block and set it on the counter. He would butcher the dragon and burn the meat. That pig was not fit to be consumed.

He went up stairs and took his first aid kit downstairs. Will was injured, and if Hannibal meant to keep him from the FBI, he could not risk taking him to the hospital. He laid out the gauze, the antiseptic, sutures. He readied several small doses of narcotics.

Hannibal had no idea when they would arrive. He took Blue and sat in his living room. His legs were in view from the window on the street. But nothing else. The angle allowed him to announce his presence while remaining safe from any gunshots from outside. The only disadvantage, he couldn’t see the front entry. He left the front and back door unlocked.

He set Blue to his right and the long knife across his lap. He and Blue kept sentinel.

*

About two hours passed. Hannibal was still and attentive. When the sound of his front door opening echoed in the quiet house, he almost sprung to his feet. There were soft footsteps in the hall. Hannibal slowly stood to his feet and silently moved to the entry. He pressed himself against the wall, to surprise the trespasser. He raised the knife ready in his hand. The footsteps grew closer, about to round the corner.

A mop of dirty brown hair appeared. Hannibal gasped in surprise and relief, grabbing the boy, hauling him behind himself while lunging out of his hiding place. His knife raised to attack the dragon, but no one was following.

Hannibal spun around to Will, his one hand still holding onto the boy for dear life. Will was white as a sheet. His face was badly bruised and bloodied. He was wearing a large shirt that wasn't his and dirty boxers.

"Will!" He gasped.

Will sobbed nodding and pushed his way into a hug. He wrapped his arms around Hannibal as if he were afraid he'd lose him.

"Where is Dolarhyde?" Hannibal asked, still looking through the entry for any sign of the man.

"I don't know," Will sobbed, "He said he wanted me to hurt you first."

Hannibal heard a soft thud on the ground. Turning, he saw a switchblade by his feet that Will had dropped.

"You're not safe here, we must leave." Hannibal said urgently, beginning to pull the boy from the front room.

"No!" Will screamed refusing to budge, "He's out there! He's going to shoot you. He'll kill you!"

"Will!" Hannibal tried to get the boy to follow him, but Will was stumbling back into the room. He was dangerously near the windows, "Will get away from there!"

"Hannibal, he'll kill you!" Will sobbed clearly not seeing the danger he was in. Hannibal strode out from the wall, directly into danger. His only goal was to pull Will to safety, but a blast shattered the window and he was knocked from his feet.

*

"NO!" Will screamed as Hannibal was blown back. He scrambled over to the man. His eyes were closed and he wasn't moving, "Hannibal!"

Will shook the man, his worst fears revealing themselves as Hannibal didn't stir, "Hannibal!" He screamed again, "Wake up! Wake up! Please!"

He saw blood spreading across Hannibal's shirt, "No, no, no!"

Will began to hyperventilate. *This can't be happening. It's not possible.* Visions of his father bleeding out in his old stained recliner left him paralyzed. Would everyone die this way? Whether in a trashed trailer or in Hannibal's pristine home, was Will the harbinger of death?

"Little one."

Will looked up. The dragon was standing in the entryway, gun in hand.

"You shot him!" Will sobbed. His hands clutching Hannibal's rumpled and stained shirt.

The dragon's eyes narrowed, "Why are you crying?"

Will pressed himself near Hannibal. He covered his body with his own. If only he could shield Hannibal from the monster.

The dragon strode near him, grabbing his hair and throwing the boy off the man. Will tried to hold on, but the dragon was too strong and he was flung away.

"No!" Will screamed. He tried to scramble back to Hannibal. But the dragon kicked him in the side, sending him rolling across the floor. He gasped for breath, clutching his side. His back was definitely bleeding again and he felt nauseous and dizzy.

He watched in terror as the dragon sneered at Hannibal lying prone on the ground and stepped closer. The dragon leaned over his body.

"So this is the great Dr. Lecter. The "Hannibal" Will screams about."

The dragon leaned down, his gun tracing Hannibal's face while Will watched, unable to move.

"Looks like my little dragon didn't want to kill you after all. I'll just have to do it myself."

The dragon's thumb drew back the hammer and aimed the silent weapon at Hannibal's head.

Will felt himself screaming as the dragon pulled the trigger. A hollow sound of the bullet hitting the floor.

The floor.

Hannibal was moving! The man had kicked out his legs sending the dragon tumbling to the ground. There was a wrestle for the gun, and it was chucked to the side as Hannibal managed to wrangle it away from the dragon, but in his efforts the dragon had regained his strength. The dragon landed a punch, sending Hannibal sprawled back.

Will shook in fear. He spotted the blood stained switchblade used to slice his back just feet from him. He crawled to it. He held it near.

The dragon was landing blow after blow across Hannibal's face. The sound made Will cover his ears. The cracking of knuckles against a jaw. It made Will sick. He just wanted to curl up and hide.

"Little one," The dragon snapped. Will looked up, the dragon had Hannibal pinned. His hands wrapped around Hannibal’s neck. Hannibal was gasping weakly and trying to fend off the dragon’s grip.His hands fighting to push the dragon away.

“Little dragon!” The dragon demanded once more, “Come here!”

Will stumbled to his feet the switchblade in his hand. He limped to the dragon. He stood swaying slightly beside the dragon.

“Cut him now,” The dragon ordered.

Will sobbed, “Please–no, please don’t make me.”

One of the dragon’s hands darted out, snagging Will’s arm and pulling him to the floor beside the monster. The dragon pulled harshly on his arm, “Stab him, or I will.”

Will choked on his tears, “Please don’t– please don’t– no more.”

“Use the knife. Or I will make his suffering ten times worse.”

Will shudder, “Ok! I'll do it, please, please–."

The dragon 's grip on his wrist tightened, the monster's nails digging into his skin, "Don't beg, do it!"

Hannibal had stopped struggling. The dragon’s hand was still crushing his neck but now he held still. His face was an odd color and his lips moved as if trying to gasp for air. But his eyes were on Will. Blown large, but always on him.

Will’s hand was guided above Hannibal’s chest. The point of the knife pressing into Hannibal’s sternum.

The dragon’s hand left his wrist, but still Will didn’t move the knife. The dragon’s presence crushed his will to move. It was impossible to fight the dragon. He would never win. He was made to serve the dragon, to be his pet and slave. It was all he knew. There was no point fighting.

A hand touched his side. It was not the dragon’s, it was Hannibal’s. Somehow he had freed his hand and instead of attacking the dragon, he was comforting Will.

Will looked into the man’s eyes. He was sputtering and gasping, but his eyes were calm and determined. Will breathed in the man’s confidence, his determination, his love.

It was like the dragon lost his hold on Will’s mind, and Hannibal was all he could think about now. What Hannibal wanted. And Hannibal wanted blood.

“Kill him, Will! Kill!” The dragon shouted.

“Yes,” Will answered Hannibal’s eyes.

He twisted the knife up instead of down. Sending the short blade into the dragon's belly. Pulling the blade up through the dragon’s flesh as he knew Hannibal wanted.

The dragon roared in pain. At the same moment Hannibal, who had been biding his time, pushed upwards, toppling the dragon back.

Now it was Hannibal on top of the dragon, twisting the knife deeper in the man. The dragon shrieked and his hand clawed at Hannibal's shoulder where the gunshot wound still bled.

Hannibal grunted, but he did not relent. He thrust the knife upward, splitting the man: stomach to sternum. The dragon scrambled back, holding his stomach as blood gushed out and organs threatened to spill.

But Hannibal wasn't finished. He stood up, covered in blood, a revengeful god on the hunt. Will watched in awe, completely enthralled by Hannibal, as Hannibal grabbed the dragon hauling him on his knees before him.

"Beg," Hannibal spat.

The dragon sneered, blood gushing from his lips.

Hannibal lunged down. His hand seemed to disappear within the dragon and the dragon screamed in agony. Hannibal pulled the man's intestines from his stomach. The black and bloody organs fisted in Hannibal's hands were then dropped as if they disgusted him. They hung out of the dragon who was no longer screaming. Hannibal pushed the dragon's still shaking body away. It fell to the floor. The Dragon's mouth wide open with blood pouring out, his eyes angry but dead.

Hannibal panted above his prey. Waiting like a mad animal to see if the monster stirred once more. The dragon twitched and bled but no further movement came.

Hannibal turned. His arms and chest were coated in blood and gore. His terrifying posture focused on Will who was still sprawled on the ground looking up at him in awe and fear.

"Mylimasis," Hannibal breathed. His terrifying beast-like form melted away and the Hannibal Will knew returned. Hannibal threw himself on the ground, gathering the boy into his arms. No thought was given to their bloody state– just that they had to hold each other.

"Hannibal!" Will sobbed, Pressing his body close to the man. The man held him so tightly muttering words Will couldn't understand. Hannibal's emotions were too strong to speak in anything other than his mother tongue.

"Mylimasis, mylimasis, mylimasis–," Hannibal repeated. Each word meant something different and something entirely new yet all the same: I love you.

His hands stayed clutched to Hannibal's shirt and Hannibal's arms were wrapped securely around his body. Their blood and the Dragon's seemed to seep together. A union of love hard earned and paid through death.

Hannibal eventually seemed to find words and he breathed them into Will's neck, "I love you Mylimasis."

Will sobbed. He couldn't speak. His thoughts were wild and confused.

Hannibal drew back, looking at Will in earnest. He cupped Will's cheek. Will instantly leaned into the touch.

"Will."

Will choked on his sobs and buried himself in Hannibal. He was so exhausted and he felt so safe slumped in the older man's arms. Hannibal picked him up from the ground. He closed his eyes, allowing Hannibal to carry him. He felt complete there as if Hannibal was the thing missing to make him happy. He wanted to hold onto the feeling forever. And as he drifted off, he couldn't help but think of waking up like this in Hannibal's arms everyday.

He smiled to himself, this was the perfect dream.

Chapter End Notes

Who's ready for part 3?!?!

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